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EDITORIAL

GORBYMANIA, GORBYPHOBIA

The results of the first nationwide referendum in the Soviet Union are as full of conundrums and contradictions as the U.S.S.R. itself. They show that a hefty majority favors preserving the Union, but it also wants meaningful sovereignty for the republics. How are these conflicting desires to be reconciled in a stable federation? What will be the fate of the large non-Baltic minorities and the economies of the Baltic States if they achieve the deserved independence that Gorbachev periodically seems willing to grant them? And what of Boris Yeltsin's victory—a majority favoring direct election of the Russian Republic's president? Will it put Yeltsin on a collision course with his own Parliament, which elected him nominal president by a bare four votes, and thus lead to yet another crisis in the fragile Soviet democracy?

Above all, what will be the economic effect of a renewed Soviet federalism? Gorbachev insists that he remains committed to marketization, but no one actually knows how to move the state economy quickly and surely in that direction, or whether the Soviet people are willing to pay the high price involved in such a transformation.

One thing is certain: Such perplexities won't deter American Sovietologists, amateur and professional, from another round of Gorbyphobia. Such mood swings about Soviet affairs are nothing new; but while the Gorbymania of the 1980s was merely silly, the Gorbyphobia of the 1990s is dangerous. Unreconstructed cold warriors and pro-détente activists alike now compete to advise and aid their favorite Soviet "democrats," even though we lack the wisdom and the right to intervene in Soviet affairs. Editorialists and politicians demand that we support Yeltsin as the "only alternative to Gorbachev," while the new despotism slouches from its provincial strongholds toward Moscow.

PEPSI'S THE ONE
Jamie Malanowski

'THE MUTLAA MASSACRE'
Christopher Hitchens

AGENT ORANGE IN VIETNAM
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READING AROUND
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THE WARRIOR STATE

IMPOSING THE NEW ORDER AT HOME

ANDREW KOPKIND

War creates consent. The best wars—those that are fought decisively, are won quickly and cost little—deliver so much approval to those who wage them it's a wonder strong leaders allow so much time to pass between campaigns. And in the case of the United States, they don't. America has been in a state of war—cold, hot and lukewarm—for as long as most citizens now living can remember. The epic struggles against fascism, communism, nationalism and tin-pot tyranny have been used effectively to manufacture support for the nation's rulers and to eliminate or contain dissent among the ruled. Now, after a half-century of construction, the warrior state is so ingrained in American institutions, has so saturated everyday ideology, is so essential to prosperity—in short, is so *totalitarian*—that government is practically unthinkable without it. And from the look of things, that past may be merely prologue to a future dressed in khaki and marching in lockstep.

The late gulf war was a paradigm of modern militarism mobilized in the service of political command. The *casus belli* may have been Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, but the context was a long history of ambiguous military engagements as well as the current paralysis of U.S. government. The malignant post-Vietnam syndrome (disease metaphors recur in political discourse like a stubborn fever) was as much on the war planners' minds as the threats of Saddam Hussein. The enemies within and without were targeted

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EXCHANGE.

'UNFAIR CALUMNY'

New York City

I regret Alexander Cockburn's attack on Amnesty International for its reporting on Iraqi abuses in Kuwait, especially because he cited the findings of Middle East Watch, a component of Human Rights Watch, in an effort to discredit Amnesty ["Beat the Devil," Feb. 4]. I particularly regret Cockburn's imputation that Amnesty erred because it was "politically convenient." This is without basis and unfairly calumniates an organization that is scrupulous about not shaping its reporting for political purposes.

Amnesty and Middle East Watch both reported that Iraq committed severe abuses, killing hundreds of Kuwaiti civilians. This information was obtained by sending investigators to interview large numbers of refugees. Neither organization obtained access to Kuwait. On-site examination of circumstantial evidence was not possible; nor could we examine official records or interview those who remained in Kuwait or talk with Iraqi authorities. Proceeding in this fashion, Middle East Watch could not confirm independently Amnesty's finding that 312 premature babies were left to die by Iraqi soldiers after being taken from incubators.

Knowing how Amnesty conducts its research, and knowing many of the people who do the work and their professional qualifications and integrity, I have only admiration for Amnesty's efforts to maintain the highest possible standards of accuracy and reliability. I know no organization in any field that puts out so much information on controversial questions that has maintained such high standards. Yet errors are possible when data must be gathered under the difficult circumstances that prevail in Kuwait, as Human Rights Watch has had to acknowledge on several occasions in comparable circumstances.

To say, however, that a possible error was made by Amnesty because it was politically convenient is ridiculous. Amnesty was reporting Iraqi abuses for many years when it was not politically convenient. Also, Amnesty has reported scrupulously on the abuses by those nations aligned with the United States and Britain in hostility to Iraq, among them Syria, Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Morocco and pre-invasion Kuwait. It is simply wrong to label Amnesty's reporting on this region, or on any region, as having been distorted to be "politically convenient."

I note also Cockburn's disparaging reference to Amnesty's 1986 report on Nicaragua. This is a peculiar moment to make that comment, as several clandestine graves have recently come to light containing the bodies of draft resisters and suspected *contra* collaborators. These discoveries tend to confirm the assessments made in 1986.

Finally, a comment on Cockburn's discussion of last year's invasion of Panama. It is ironic that after criticizing Amnesty for exaggerating Iraqi abuses in Kuwait, Cockburn asserts that "estimates of more than 1,000 and possibly as many as 2,500 [civilians killed in Panama] seem plausible." Moreover, after citing Middle East Watch to contradict Amnesty's reporting on Iraqi-occupied Kuwait, Cockburn fails to point out that another division of our organization, Americas Watch, was able to verify the killing of only some 300 civilians in Panama. We find the evidence cited by those claiming much higher totals to be unpersuasive. Without taking the space here to review that evidence, it should be noted that the circumstances for an investigation were far better than in Kuwait. We could visit the sites; we could interview witnesses in Panama; we could interview officials and examine their records; and we could obtain the assistance of Panamanian human rights monitors with whom we had previously worked. We consider that the manner in which civilians were killed in Panama violated the laws of war; also, our figure on civilian deaths is half again as high as that of the Pentagon, while our figure on Panamanian military casualties is much lower (making the civilian-to-military death ratio troublingly high). We believe the Pentagon and the new Panamanian government failed in their duty to account for all civilian deaths. Yet we see no basis for the estimates offered by Cockburn.

Could it be that Cockburn offers such high estimates because, with his politics, he finds it "politically convenient"?

Aryeh Neier, executive director
Human Rights Watch

'UNFOUNDED CHARGES'

New York City

Alexander Cockburn has attacked the factual accuracy, research methods and political motivation of Amnesty International. He called the reports of mass murder of infants in Kuwait a "myth" and implied that Amnesty had been propagating "tales" of atrocity, and he accused the organization of producing "sloppy . . . politically convenient work."

All those charges are unfounded. For thirty years, Amnesty has based its work, within the framework of its well-defined mandate, on strictly observed principles of impartiality, balance, fairness, consistency and, above all, accuracy. It has built an impressive reputation for applying the same international human rights standards to all governments regardless of political ideology.

Amnesty's report on the human rights situation in occupied Kuwait, released last December, is just one of a series released over the past ten years documenting human rights abuses by Iraqi government forces. It stated that hundreds of people in Kuwait had been arbitrarily detained, tortured or extrajudicially executed. Amnesty also noted reports that hundreds of infants had been killed by the deliberate denial of essential medical treatment.

Amnesty based its report on in-depth interviews with more than 100 people from about a dozen countries. No one will ever be able to spell out, in every detail, the horrendous suffering unleashed on the Kuwaiti people during the occupation of their country. Amnesty received and continues to receive numerous reports from different sources confirming that babies died on a large scale as a result of being removed from incubators by or on the orders of Iraqi security forces.

The Amnesty researcher did not physically count the bodies in occupied Kuwait. That fact does not mean that a human rights tragedy of such magnitude did not happen. Amnesty's research methods require a painstaking process of cross-checking, corroboration and confirmation of critical facts from independent sources. Sometimes that process is painfully slow—documenting the gruesome events of August, September and October in Kuwait had to wait until December to be made public by Amnesty. Our evidence has been cross-checked and corroborated by sources who in our judgment are credible and reliable.

Cockburn further disputed our report by questioning the existence of so many incubators in Kuwait. Our information indicates that at the time of the invasion, there were approximately 370 incubators in Kuwait. According to reliable information obtained by Amnesty, the number of incubators in five of the state hospitals totaled 300, in addition to approximately seventy incubators in private hospitals and polyclinics.

As far as his other charges are concerned, Cockburn should know that Amnesty takes no position on the dispute over Kuwait and has never taken a position on armed conflict anywhere. To imply that it has taken sides by producing "politically convenient work" is just plain wrong. In support of his unsubstantiated charge, Cockburn made a vague reference to Amnesty's 1986 report on Nicaragua. We stand by the findings of the report on Nicaragua with the same degree of confidence as any other report that Amnesty has produced.

Amnesty believes that human rights abuses must be addressed evenhandedly everywhere and at all times. In the four months preceding the issue of its report on Kuwait, Amnesty had raised concerns about routine and systematic torture in Turkey, the detention and torture of prisoners of conscience in Syria, the arbitrary arrest, detention and torture of hundreds of Yemenis in Saudi Arabia, the continued excessive use of lethal force in the Israeli occupied territories and the detention and torture of political prisoners in Egypt. These reports reflected some of Amnesty's recent concerns in the Middle East. At the same time, we raised concerns about numerous countries in other parts of the world.

We have been greatly disturbed by the selective use of our information by the Administra-

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EDITORIALS.

No War, No Peace

What next for the Middle East? (1) U.S. forces are not going to leave Iraq, Kuwait or Saudi Arabia for a long time. (2) Conventional and "unconventional" weapons of mass destruction will proliferate, with the United States shipping the latest killing machines to its clients, and other arms makers servicing the rest. (3) The wealth of the oil monarchs will continue to be spent in the West (the rich Arabs nixed the idea of a regional development bank); for a while prime deals will go to construction companies rather than investment houses. (4) Despite (or perhaps because of) the new U.S. leverage, the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab conflicts are far from resolution.

What are we doing in Iraq? There is every indication that the gang of eight running U.S. war policy gave little thought to the aftermath of their carpet-bombing of Iraq's civilian infrastructure and are now praying Iraq will escape Lebanonization. So far there has been no U.S. contact with the democratic Iraqi opposition, perhaps because that motley crew contains radicalized Kurds and fundamentalist Shiites, and even the Israelis have stopped calling for Saddam's removal. But for all anyone knows, the U.S. Special Forces inside Iraq since last fall may now be collaborating with Iran-backed rebels in the south, bringing a new meaning to the Iran/*contra* connection.

The coalition's justification for continued intervention in Iraq's internal affairs rests precariously on Security Council Resolutions 678 and 686. President Bush's warning to Saddam Hussein to stop using helicopter gunships against Kurdish

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rebels, for example, is based on language in Resolution 686 that calls on Iraq to "cease hostile . . . actions by its forces against all member states, including . . . flights of combat aircraft." (Those wouldn't happen to be the Bell 214 helicopters we sold to Saddam in 1985, would they?) The triumphalists won't admit it, but the devastation of Iraq has made it impossible to "restore international peace and security in the area," as called for in those resolutions.

At the moment U.S. and allied forces control some 20 percent of Iraq's territory, where there are anywhere from a half-million to a million Iraqis—mostly Shiites—living in villages and towns, and no doubt many refugees from internal rebellion and repression are fleeing into the zone. Today it may be a sanctuary, but as Iraq's inner turmoil continues and U.S. involvement deepens, it will become a quagmire.

And what could we be doing in Israel/Palestine? Secretary of State James Baker has been calling on all the parties to the conflict to engage in unilateral "confidence-building measures" in the hope that they will lead to a breakthrough. But what about the U.S. role?

To build confidence that this time things will be different, the United States could remind Israel of its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 to respect the rights of Palestinians in the occupied territories. It could insist that the Secretary General report on their condition, as he was supposed to by "the first week of March 1991," according to Security Council Resolution 681 of December 20, 1990, which passed unanimously, and it could organize the conference on the convention called for by 681 to focus attention on Israel's inhumane treatment of Palestinians.

In his March 6 address to Congress, Bush rightly reminded Israel of the U.S. commitment to the principle of "territory for peace . . . elaborated to provide for Israel's security and recognition." But in his mention of "legitimate Palestinian political rights" he stopped short, as he and his predecessors always have, of talking about self-determination, the other necessary condition of a just and lasting peace. "Autonomy" may again be the name of the game, and the Bush and Shamir administrations may believe that this is the moment to impose it on the Palestinians. But if the decades-old Iraq-Kuwait dispute is any guide, imposed settlements do not bring peace to the Middle East. They plant the seeds of future wars.

The Class Gap

Much attention has recently been paid to the growing disparity in the mortality rates of blacks and whites. There is a moral imperative to mobilize social resources to reverse this trend. But there is another mortality gap, one that is not talked about: the social class gap. Because the United States, unlike most industrialized nations, does not regularly collect and publish mortality statistics by class, we do not know how many more years a corporate lawyer lives than an unskilled blue-collar or service worker.

On one of the few occasions that the government did gather such information, however, in 1986 (and measuring only deaths from heart and cerebrovascular diseases), the results were stunning. People of any race with less formal education, with lower incomes and belonging to the working class (those whom the Census classifies under the terms "operator" and "services") die at higher rates than people belonging to the upper classes (those designated "managers" and "professionals"). The death rate from heart disease, for example, was 2.3 times higher among unskilled blue-collar operators than among managers and professionals. By contrast, the mortality rate from heart disease in 1986 for blacks was 1.3 times higher than for whites.

Did these enormous gaps close or widen during the 1980s? We have no means of knowing. But we do know that class differentials in the rates at which people get sick have been growing. From 1983 to 1988 the percentage of individuals with an annual income over $60,000 who had limited activity due to a chronic condition declined, while for those with incomes less than $10,000, it increased. It is fair to assume that the class differentials in mortality have been increasing as well. And the rise in the black death rate offers further grounding for this assumption, since blacks, because of racism, are disproportionately concentrated in the low-income groups.

In the 1980s the U.S. population underwent severe class polarization, with a reduction of the middle class, a slow growth of the upper and upper-middle classes, and a rapid growth of the low-paid, unskilled working class. The low earners are a heterogeneous group—blacks, Latinos, whites, men and women—whose standard of living is fast deteriorating. They belong to the 40 percent of the population that received only 15.7 percent of the total income in 1984, the lowest amount since such figures were first kept, in 1947. On the other hand, the wealthiest 20 percent received 42.9 percent of the total income, the highest ever. This growing disparity of wealth and income is the main, if not exclusive, reason for the growing differentials in morbidity and mortality between whites and blacks. The deteriorating working and living conditions of the low-wage working class are reflected in the statistics on death and disease. Within each class, minorities are even worse off. This is why the life expectancy of blacks has been declining, and that of whites is improving at an unprecedentedly slow rate. It is also the reason that the publication of health statistics in racial terms is insufficient.

We as a nation need to do much more to eliminate racism, but we also need to eliminate the fatal consequences of classism. The growing mortality differentials between whites and blacks are part of larger mortality differentials—class differentials. The publication of health statistics in racial terms assumes that white unskilled workers have more in common with white lawyers, for example, than with black unskilled workers. They do not. White workers have far more in common, in the way they live, get sick and die, with black workers than with white lawyers. And the same may be said of black workers and black lawyers. Yet the way in which statistics are kept does not help to make white and black workers aware of the commonality of their predicament. The collection and

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publication of mortality statistics by race *and* class would help to unite rather than separate black and white laborers.

Class differentials in mortality rates are not unique to the United States. In other industrialized nations not only do they exist but they are on the rise, and great national and international debates on the reasons for this have begun. Meanwhile, in the United States the silence persists. VICENTE NAVARRO

Vicente Navarro is a professor of health policy and sociology at Johns Hopkins University.

Pepsi's the One

The A.P. photo that appeared on the front page of The New York Times *on March 4, showing a scowling Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf seated next to Saudi Gen. Khalid bin Sultan at a plain wooden table, dictating peace terms to a pair of Iraqi generals, recorded a detail that history will little note nor long remember: The picture revealed that at his moment of greatest triumph, the commanding general of Operation Desert Storm had a can of Diet Pepsi within easy reach. Surely this detail did not go unnoticed at the headquarters of a certain large soft-drink company.*

From: VP for Creative Development, Division of Marketing
To: Office of the Chairman, Office of the President, Division VPs
Re: Postwar marketing proposals

I've passed along your congratulations to Ron and the other guys in Product Placement and of course to Fouad, our intrepid man in the gulf, in appreciation for a job well done. I must say we had long been looking for a new product-placement vehicle—the movie bit having been done to death—when this whole war thing became current and got us thinking. I must admit that this success still fell somewhat short of our original plan, which called for both Schwarzkopf and Khalid to be drinking Diet Pepsis, and for the Iraqis to be drinking Diet Cokes. Then we found out Khalid felt he'd been doing too much caffeine lately and wanted a Pepsi Free. Then the Iraqis piped up and asked for Sprite (!), and everything started to get hectic and complicated, and all the military guys started rolling their eyes—they just wanted to get on with the surrender—so finally we just cut bait and went with Norm and the Diet P.

Anyway, based on our success in this venture, we took the liberty of working up some ideas for a new campaign. Naturally, some of these concepts are predicated on reaching spokesperson deals with the appropriate individuals, but that has never been much of an obstacle in this corporation, has it? I'll caveat that these are in the formative stages, but we're confident you'll like them.

First, we think we can do more with Norm Schwarzkopf. Admittedly, he's a little beefy for a diet drink ad, not normally the stereotype we look for, but Norm is a very well-known commodity, a high Q kind of guy. Basically, we see a scenario where Norm appears in his now-familiar news conference setting—he's got fatigues, he's got charts, he's taking questions—and then a reporter says, "What do you think of Diet Coke?" And Norm says, "I'll tell you what I think: It doesn't offer flavor, it doesn't offer taste, it's not refreshing, I don't like it and I never drink it. Apart from that, I think it's a great soft drink." Then he looks straight into the camera, and with that wide, confident grin Americans have grown to love, says, "Diet Pepsi: the choice of a post-Vietnam generation."

Second, we're working on a "smart weapons" ad. The commercial opens up, we're in the cockpit of one of those fighting Warthogs, we're with the pilots, they fire off one of those Tomahawk cruise missiles, we look on the pilot's monitor, we follow the missile down toward a building, we see it go down an airshaft, we see it enter a hallway, we see it turn down another hallway, we see it go up to a Pepsi machine, we see it put in some coins, we see it select a Pepsi and drink it. Then it goes down another hallway, spots a Coke machine and clobbers it. The announcer says, "Pepsi: the soft drink of the new world order." (This would work well with our new print campaign, which shows the now-familiar sky above Dhahran filled with incoming Coke Scuds, with Pepsi Patriots shooting up to intercept.)

Finally, we're developing something involving General Powell. Basically, we put Ray Charles on hiatus and put Powell at the piano with the Raelettes (possibly renamed for the occasion: Colinettes? Powellettes?). They sit there, they kid around, they sing "You've got the right one," but then to do the "uh-huh"s we cameo a lineup of Desert Storm celebrities: General Kelly, General Neal, Pete Williams, Benjamin Netanyahu, Ambassador al-Sabah, Steve Solarz, maybe some ordinary dogfaces, maybe Arthur Kent, maybe Wolf Blitzer, maybe—oh, what the hell—Peter Arnett, all of them taking a turn going "Uh-huh, Uh-huh." Then this Saddam look-alike comes on and opens his mouth, but we right away cut to a close-up of Powell, who just shakes his head and says, "Uh-uh." I think it's a grabber.

I hope these proposals meet with your approval. Our military has performed heroically in winning the war; it would be a tragedy if we couldn't profit from the peace.

JAMIE MALANOWSKI

Jamie Malanowski, national editor of Spy, *is co-author of the forthcoming* Spy High *(Doubleday).*

★

THE PICKED UP BY THE LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT BLUES

If I done right or I done wrong,
I'd sooner be held by the Vietcong.

Calvin Trillin

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MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Watching the latest in L.A. video—whereby you may recline in your own home and view a selection of white policemen as they put the leather (and the billy club and the stun gun) to Mr. Rodney King—I thought, by God, the L.A.P.D. has really kicked the Selma syndrome once and for all. Yes, *sir.* Conversation among enlightened friends has tended to focus on the essential part played by the rear-guard cops, those who formed a thoughtful audience for the beating. Apart from the fact that they seemed to confirm the essential normalcy of the crime, in that the pounding officers knew that they need fear no informer or critic, these chaps evidently cared nothing for the good name of the white male. They were unaware that moralists from Dante to Sartre have stressed the culpability of those who are complicit by silence or inaction.

Or for that matter, complicit by applause and enthusiasm. In a deadpan report from Los Angeles dated March 18, *The New York Times* accidentally provided the perfect metaphor:

> Surrounded by yellow ribbons hung on his behalf at police headquarters, Chief Gates told a crowd of cheering supporters that he would not heed widespread calls for his resignation following the beating on March 3 of Rodney G. King.

This could scarcely be bettered as an illustration of the latent symbolism of the yellow ribbon: a celebration of the essential cowardice and bluster that accompany a chauvinistic confidence in overwhelming brute force. Evidence of this general coarsening can be found on all sides. It was present in all the arguments about the "softening up" of Iraq by saturation bombardment. It was an education to hear liberals express their qualms about a ground war, phrasing those qualms in the language of restraint. This artifice didn't always serve to disguise the reality. I began to get seriously worried when Eliot Cohen argued for a continued air war in *The New Republic* of February 11:

> It is conceivable, if unlikely, that a ground battle could turn into a bloody fiasco. More likely, however, it would succeed, in that we would liberate Kuwait, although that might not end the war. But would a quick win be a cheap one? Consider a model blitz, the German attack on Poland in 1939.

I see what you mean, Professor Cohen, though I think you might feel on reflection that it belongs in the category of things that could have been better put.

Over the past several weeks I have been intrigued by the nonexistence of the phrase "the Mutlaa massacre." Mutlaa (see "Minority Report," March 25) is the site of the funkily named "Highway of Death," where American pilots caught a convoy of fleeing Iraqis, bombed the vehicles at both ends and then returned to shred and dismember the resulting traffic jam again and again. Everybody sat and watched *those* pictures. Yet for public and historical purposes, no memory or consciousness of the incident exists. And Saudi "mortuary platoons" made haste to inter the evidence, so we have no clear idea of how many bodies were Iraqi and how many were Asian guest-workers joining the rout. (On this unexamined question, Stephen Sackur of BBC Radio reported grimly that the charred bodies were often to be found holding suitcases with pathetic labels from the Indian subcontinent.)

Without particularly looking for a fight on this point, I've been impressed by the number of people who have mentioned it in hushed tones, almost as if Mutlaa were a distinct private grief to be discussed under the breath. An admiral at a Washington dinner party said that he was amazed by the absence of revulsion. A German television crew, interviewing me, was politely incredulous at the stoic fashion in which American viewers had "taken in" the scene. Correspondents from as far away as Australia and as near as Canada have asked me the same question. So have individuals in bars and bookstores, each of them half-apologizing for his or her apparent squeamishness. If everybody who marveled at the absence of a protest had protested, there would have been a protest.

Of course, the circumstances aren't completely normal. The "peace movement" had in effect demanded an air war in order to keep the "body bag" number low, and the Democratic leadership had done the same. Thus the White House and the Pentagon were executing the wishes of their liberal and pacifist critics. There are some problems, after all, which do yield to a technological fix. A demand that all casualties be of Iraqi or Asian parentage, when made by public opinion, is a demand that can be easily met. Those who will the end must not quibble about the means.

Not one voice is being raised to inquire what the United States Army is now doing in Iraq. The borders of Kuwait have been restored to their former integrity, which means, incidentally, that the provision of U.N. Resolution 660 that calls for intensive negotiations between Iraq and Kuwait on their longstanding territorial dispute has been casually set aside. Meanwhile, Palestinian agriculture on the West Bank has been all but destroyed by a curfew that has prevented the tending of fields or animals, and good reports have it that residents of the West Bank who leave for any purpose are being denied the right to return. In an attempt to split the P.L.O., Saudi and Kuwaiti envoys have met in Damascus with Ahmed Jabril and Abu Musa, two mercenary puppets with rejectionist records. Iran is gloating at the Lebanonization of Iraq, a process that the U.S. occupation is apparently not designed to retard. All the tactics of divide-and-rule, of the sort that led to the war in the first place, are being pursued with great vigor. And we . . . look on.

* * *

Speaking of divide-and-rule, I was much interested to see the full-page, full-color "thank you" advertisement taken out by the Kuwaitis in *The Washington Post* of March 11. The accompanying regional map showed Lebanon as part of Syria, the West Bank as part of Israel, Yemen as re-partitioned between North and South and Cyprus as having sunk into the sea. This cosmology makes one quiver in anticipation of the new regional order.

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EDWARD SOREL

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IT'S REALLY TOUCHING... THEY'VE READ ABOUT THE MIRACLES I DID IN THE OLD DAYS AND THEY ASSUME I STILL DO THAT SORT OF THING.
BUT YOU KNOW WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I STARTED TO DO REAL MIRACLES AGAIN? I'LL TELL YOU...
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...I CAN'T KEEP THOSE KIND OF HOURS ANYMORE.
Edward Sorel

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ARTICLES.

AGENT ORANGE IN VIETNAM

The Persisting Poison

PETER KORN

In the shadow of a mountain called Black Lady sits Tan Lap, a border village of 1,000 Vietnamese who live off a hurly-burly market set up for trade between Vietnam and Cambodia. To get to Tan Lap you drive north and west from Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon, through some of the most fertile countryside in the world. But the land around Tan Lap lies barren; the sterile dirt is hard and unyielding. "A jungle used to stand here," says a villager.

There is a clinic in Tan Lap. A child is brought out, one of many. The child does not speak. His face never changes expression. In fact, he sits as still as humanly possible for as long as he is on display, allowing the half-formed stump that extends where his right arm should be to speak for him. His eyes never leave you.

Sitting beside the boy, Dong Thuy Ninh, the local doctor, explains that ten years ago there were many more children born with missing limbs. Now, only a few cases appear each year. But, the doctor explains, most of the community's adults suffer from liver ailments, including cancer.

Seventy miles away in Ho Chi Minh City, in Southeast Asia's largest obstetrics hospital, Nguyen Thi Ngoc Phuong stands as still as the little boy in the village, and like the boy, she lets her surroundings speak. Wooden shelves line the walls around Phuong, an obstetrician and deputy director of Tu Du Maternity Hospital. Five-gallon glass jars fill the shelves. Inside each jar is an aborted or stillborn fetus. The lifeless figures in the bottles are all horribly deformed.

According to Phuong, each fetus is a possible victim of dioxin poisoning, the legacy of defoliants sprayed in South Vietnam by the Americans. Phuong's voice remains calm as she describes the contents of the jars. "Deformities of the nervous system," Phuong says in response to a question about the most common birth defect she has observed. Pointing to three jars in a row, she says, "Anencephaly, no brain." Phuong recites in order of frequency the abnormalities of children she has been delivering since the war. Deformity of limbs follows that of the nervous system. Sensory-organ deformities and cleft palate are also common, she says. And there is one more, Phuong adds, an inexplicable anomaly that has confounded Vietnamese physicians. As many as ten pairs of Siamese twins have been born here each year, when one case every ten to fifteen years would be expected.

The last U.S. troops pulled out of Vietnam in 1975. The United States has not re-established diplomatic recognition, and a trade embargo prevents U.S. companies from doing business with the Vietnamese. We have done everything possible to forget what happened in Vietnam, and what remains, including our national responsibility. Wars do not end when the battles stop—not when toxic chemicals have been used in the fighting. During the Vietnam War, the United States defoliated an estimated 4.5 million acres of Vietnamese countryside through the use of Agent Orange.

Irony, too, abounds in that barren countryside. Through chemical warfare the United States created not only medical horrors but an irreplaceable human laboratory, the one place in the world where it is possible to begin unraveling the riddle of dioxin, a toxin that poses dangers to people worldwide. And once again it is politics that impedes our humanity and our own best interests.

Peter Korn writes frequently on environmental issues.

More than 11 million gallons of Agent Orange were dumped on South Vietnam, often showering down on farmers and their families. Whole forests were turned into barren wasteland.

The Vietnam War was a jungle war to begin with, and conventional means of fighting it proved fruitless in the early years. North Vietnamese soldiers infiltrated southern territory, often maintaining positions near U.S. bases by using the cover of forests. The U.S. response was to destroy the jungle by spraying chemicals that would kill the vegetation, and thus the hiding places. Chemical companies in the United States, including Dow, came up with Agent Orange, a mixture of the commercial herbicides 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T, and other similar compounds. Until 1979 these same herbicides were used extensively on American farms and backyard lawns.

More than 11 million gallons of Agent Orange were dumped on South Vietnam, often showering down on farmers and their families. Whole forests were turned into barren wasteland. Jungles teeming with vegetation became lifeless, with leafless trees standing alone above infertile soil. Wildlife died. In some areas agricultural crops were sprayed, and that land became infertile for up to ten years. The chemicals remained in the soil and the food chain, and the Vietnamese lived in constant exposure to them.

The herbicides contain the dioxin T.C.D.D., one of the most toxic chemicals known. In study after study, it has been shown to cause a variety of cancers. Although deadly, T.C.D.D. is still something of a mystery to scientists. Its exact effects—all the diseases it might cause, the doses that might be unsafe—are unknown. It is suspected of causing birth defects in the offspring of women who are exposed, although until now scientists have never been able to conduct large-scale studies of

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exposed mothers. In South Vietnam, an entire generation of such women lives and suffers.

From 1984 to 1988 a group of independent physicians from the United States, Canada, West Germany and Britain tested breast milk from Vietnamese mothers. The tests showed that the milk of women from the heavily sprayed province of Song Be still contained elevated levels of T.C.D.D. ten years after the spraying ended. Eighty percent of the female hospital patients in South Vietnam show elevated levels of T.C.D.D. in their bodies, according to a Vietnamese government scientist. Only one out of twenty-one women tested in unsprayed North Vietnam showed a detectable level of T.C.D.D. Infant mortality in South Vietnam is high, possibly due to dioxin being passed through the breast milk.

In addition to infant mortality and birth defects, spontaneous abortion rates are up in sprayed areas, according to Phuong. So are rates of hydatidiform moles, a fetal malformation. Liver cancer rates are astronomical, and soft-tissue cancer, lymphoma and lung cancer have all increased. Vietnamese physicians have observed that women in North Vietnam who were never in contact with defoliants but whose husbands fought in sprayed areas of the south have also given birth to children with major birth defects. This raises the possibility that the dioxins might have affected the chromosomes of the soldiers.

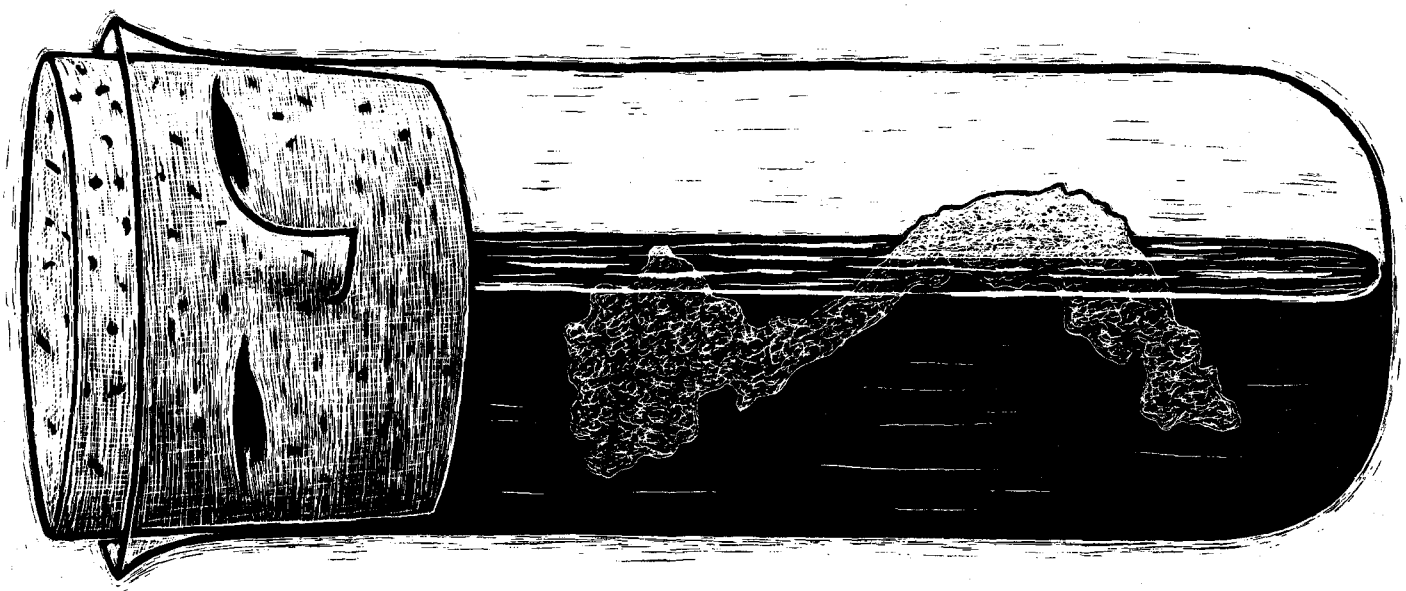
The 45-year-old Phuong bears witness to this tragedy daily. Her life is the stuff of movies, and, in fact, has been made into a movie in Vietnam. In the streets of Ho Chi Minh City people speak of her with awe, as a combination of Albert Schweitzer and Evita Perón. But she is the most unlikely looking of heroines. The hair that frames her face hangs limp, and she is constantly pushing it away. Her tired eyes beseech even as she provides answers. Yet there is also great energy. Phuong estimates that she works twelve hours a day, seven days a week treating patients, teaching, administering, providing the life force for Southeast Asia's largest maternity hospital.

An old wooden desk rests in a corner of Phuong's office. Stenciled on its side are the words "U.S. Government Property." It is one of the few pieces of American equipment in this entire dilapidated hospital. A few Western countries have donated excess equipment since the war, Phuong says. Two ultrasound machines came from West Germany. A Japanese group donated anesthesiology machinery in 1985. Nothing from America, Phuong points out with eyebrows only slightly raised.

At Tu Du, the supply of sharp scissors for severing umbilical cords is depleted, so dull ones are used. A miniature hatrack sits on a second floor balcony, bearing rubber surgical gloves drying in the steamy summer air. The sterile gloves are manufactured to be used once and thrown away, but the hospital washes and re-uses each pair up to ten times because there are no others. Thirty-year-old incubators, lacking oxygen regulators and often holding more than one infant, line another room. The hospital's only fetal-heart monitor is broken. This could be a war-zone infirmary, except that the war ended sixteen years ago.

Through all this Phuong moves with a tired grace, wanting desperately to study her patients but with barely enough time to treat them. Over the past twenty years, she has helped put together three studies focusing on dioxin exposure in Tu Du patients. She began by reviewing hospital administration reports. Patient records from 1952 to 1985 were analyzed and showed that hydatidiform moles, fetal death in utero and congenital malformations all increased significantly after 1962, the year the U.S. Army began its defoliation program in Vietnam.

In a second study, Phuong and her colleagues compared the records of patients from the heavily sprayed village of Thanh Phong with patient records of women from an area of unsprayed Ho Chi Minh City. Phuong's data showed that women in the exposed village were 4.6 times more likely to suffer hydatidiform moles, 2.2 times more likely to undergo spontaneous abortions and 2.5 times more likely to bear children with birth defects. Fetal death in utero was twenty-six times more likely among the exposed women. Approaching the problem from another angle, Phuong says she conducted a study at Tu Du on patients with hydatidiform moles and birth defects, looking backward to see from where the women



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came. Consistently, she says, a link was established between those patients and heavily sprayed areas.

The lack of funds for analyzing tissue for dioxin is the major hurdle obstructing Phuong's research. Phuong has sent forty-three tissue samples to Western laboratories without payment. Seventeen have been analyzed. The mean level of dioxin from those samples was 22.4 parts per trillion; the highest level was 103 parts per trillion, from a pregnant woman afflicted with uterine cancer who died soon thereafter. That sample was taken fifteen years after the Agent Orange spraying was halted, Phuong says. (A level of six to eight parts per trillion is common in the United States.)

Phuong is not the only Vietnamese physician studying dioxin. In Hanoi, Le Cao Dai, a surgeon, is general secretary of Vietnam's 10-80 Committee, which coordinates national research into the Agent Orange problem. His committee's annual budget is $10,000.

Dai keeps charts in the 10-80 conference room showing the various diseases and birth defects Vietnamese scientists are tracking. One anomaly he mentions is the incidence of immune deficiency diseases; malaria and dengue fever rates have markedly increased in sprayed areas. There is scientific evidence connecting dioxin and the immune system in laboratory animals, and Dai hypothesizes that an immune deficiency caused by dioxin could somehow be responsible for a number of diseases. He is much more certain about the relationship between dioxin and birth defects, listing cerebral spine defects, anencephaly, spina bifida, hydrocephaly and learning disabilities.

Physicians in Vietnam are convinced that a link exists between male exposure to dioxin and birth defects, but no model exists for the pathogenesis; no one can explain how defects happen. Dai would like to analyze the semen of his country's war veterans for dioxin and follow their offspring, but he does not have the funds. Nor is there money for extensive soil analyses to determine where dioxin might still pollute the land. There would be little chance of moving whole populations anyway. "In our country no cleanup effort has been made. The people still live in the area," Dai admits.

Vietnam is poverty-stricken, even by Third World standards. Only 16 percent of the children are normal weight for their age. And that percentage is unlikely to increase—the country is stuck in an economic morass, cut off from the bulk of Western trade by the embargo and run by a Communist bureaucracy that has failed to develop a sound economic base. The Vietnamese population, now estimated at 65 million, is expected to double in thirty-five years. Research funds are a luxury the Vietnamese can hardly afford.

Vietnamese research is fragmentary and often contradictory, and definitive proof of T.C.D.D.'s effects is still remote. This is where physicians such as John Constable become important. A surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, Constable's interest in Vietnam arose in 1970, when he participated in an early study on ecological and medical effects of herbicides in Vietnam. He interviewed soldiers, toured hospitals and began taking samples of mothers' milk and tissue from fish caught in South Vietnam's rivers. After the war the Vietnamese government invited Constable to be-

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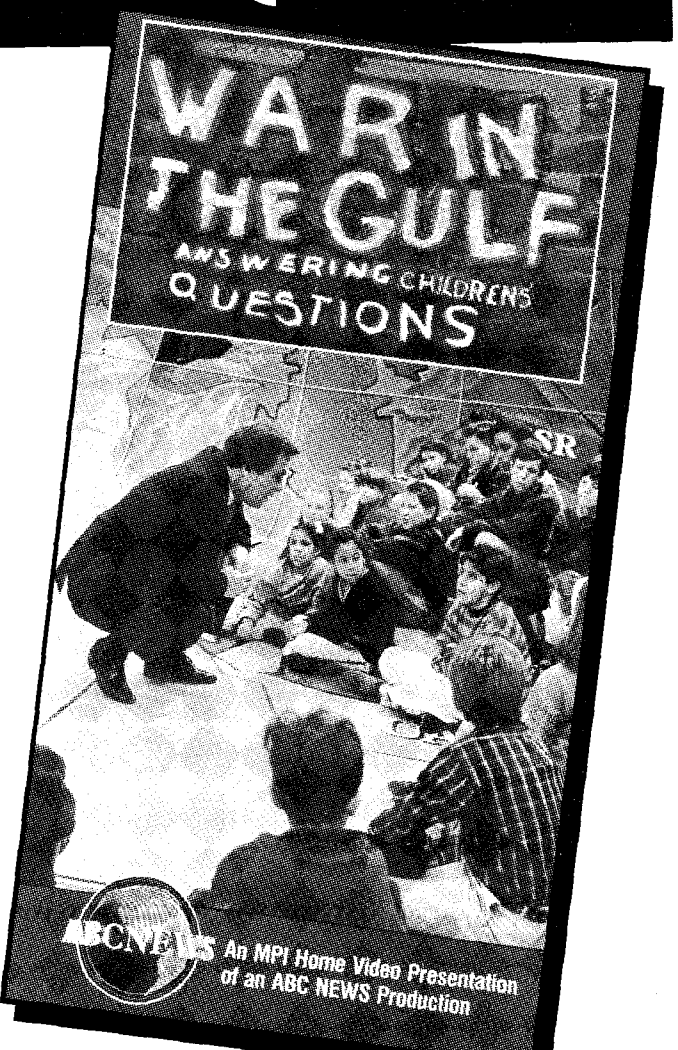

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come the first American to serve on the 10-80 Committee.

Three years ago, Constable attended an international conference on dioxins, where the question of Vietnam studies was addressed. "The one conclusion that everyone agreed upon was that Vietnam was the one laboratory in which anyone interested in the health effects of dioxin could get a definitive answer," he says. Yet most Western doctors are completely unfamiliar with the Vietnamese data, according to Constable. "I think that is partly because of difficulties in translation, but also partly because of an extreme reluctance to accept the possibility of a good scientific study coming out of a country that we don't even recognize."

Two tragedies are unfolding in Vietnam today: the health effects resulting from chemical warfare and the world medical community's willingness to ignore the country. After dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki the United States rushed medical supplies to the devastated Japanese as well as research teams to study the effects of radiation poisoning. But the response to the toxic storm dropped on the Vietnamese has been absolute silence, despite the fact that so much could be gained from making use of Vietnam as a dioxin laboratory.

The U.S. Veterans Administration has abandoned much of its research into the effect of Agent Orange on the health of Vietnam veterans because of researchers' inability to draw a clear association between most veterans and exposure to defoliants. The disease patterns of the veterans and their offspring appear real, but the evidence of the soldiers' exposure has proved unreliable. Determining how much dioxin soldiers actually came into contact with is nearly impossible, the V.A. has declared, after spending millions of dollars on the attempt. Only the few troops who actually handled the defoliating chemicals have consistently tested positive for elevated levels of dioxin. "Twenty years after the war we're having difficulty finding veterans with elevated dioxin levels," says Dr. Arnold Schechter, a professor of preventive medicine at the State University of New York at Binghamton who has participated in dioxin studies on U.S. veterans.

Recent evidence suggests that dioxin levels in the blood of certain people living in the United States and industrialized Europe approach the levels found in South Vietnamese. A few physicians in Scandinavia have cautioned women there to cease breast-feeding because of the danger of dioxin transmission to infants. Municipal incinerators and paper and pulp mills in the United States have been found to release large amounts of dioxin, some of which finds its way into the food chain. (Interestingly, milk from women in North Vietnam, where no Agent Orange spraying took place, shows less T.C.D.D. than milk from women tested in the United States, which suggests that the random levels of dioxin in our environment exceed those of Vietnam.)

Schechter, who has devoted much of his career to studying dioxin, has visited Vietnam seven times. He has sought research dollars from the gamut of American funding institutions, and he has run into the same brick wall as Phuong. "The large foundations have been afraid to touch Vietnam or Agent Orange, dioxin or any combination of those," he says. "The chances of being funded by the National Institutes of Health for dioxin research in Vietnam right now are very close to zero."

Phuong envisions an exhaustive study of two Vietnamese villages, one sprayed, the other unsprayed. First she would test all the residents for dioxin levels, then follow their medical histories over ten years. The bill for such a study would reach about $2 million each year. But time is running out for scientific investigation. The measurable life of T.C.D.D. in humans is estimated at somewhere between fifteen and twenty years, and once the dioxin is gone the provable link between diseases and the substance has vanished.

"My feeling is that we should be conceptualizing the study designs at this point and implementing them at least through collecting the specimens of blood and fat and milk, which could be analyzed later," Schechter says. "We really need to be collecting those specimens now. We were told we were trying to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people. I saw many a boy die for that cause. In addition, it bothers me very much that over 55,000 [American] lives were lost and we do have the opportunity now to win the hearts and minds of Vietnamese. And we're not taking advantage of that."

Ten thousand miles away, all Nguyen Phuong can manage is a weary smile. She has heard Western scientists express enthusiasm for further research in Vietnam, only to return with excuses instead of funds. Usually, Phuong says, they lay the blame on politics. "Some of them think if they help us in carrying out research, if we get scientific proof about the relationship between Agent Orange and liver diseases and birth defects, the U.S. government will have some difficulties," she says softly.

"If scientists want more knowledge they must come to Vietnam. They must conduct their scientific research in Vietnam, in cooperation with Vietnamese scientists." She adds, with unmistakable exasperation, "Many scientists have told me that Vietnam is the best laboratory for carrying out scientific research on dioxin. Only in Vietnam was the environment heavily and repeatedly sprayed. Only in Vietnam were many millions of people sprayed. Only in Vietnam can their offspring and the next generation be studied."

Surrounded by her patients and memories of patients past, Phuong maintains her dream of large-scale, multimillion-dollar research projects. But she also knows of the disregard that has been shown her work by Western doctors. Asked how

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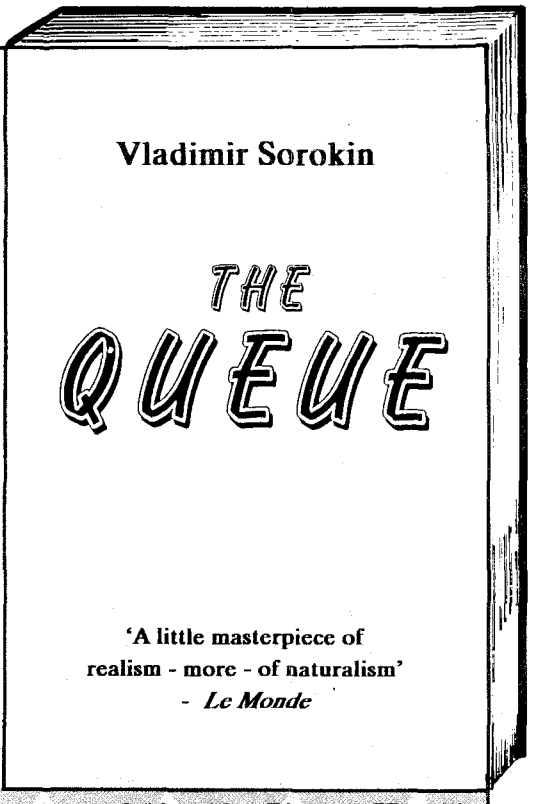

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she would respond to Western scientists who question the validity of data she and her colleagues have gathered, Phuong allows a sad smile to steal across her face.

Her answer is a simple one: "Please come." □

New Order

(*Continued From Front Cover*)

for ordnance or propaganda, whichever was appropriate.

From the start, the multistage and richly layered U.S. response in the gulf was strategically directed against the syndrome and all its symptoms: anti-interventionism, progressive political action, black and minority alienation and separation, Third World solidarity consciousness, radical environmentalism, cultural "permissiveness," feminist and gay activism, class and labor demands—all those movements, tendencies and patterns of thought and behavior that seemed to take hold in the American civitas and psyche from the Vietnam era. Victory in the gulf was supposed to produce the kind of harmony and unanimity that had not been seen in America since World War II—a model in many ways for this desert battle.

But there were pressing failures on the home front last summer as the gulf was simmering. The pathetic performance by both the Bush Administration and Congress during the long budget negotiations convinced many die-hard democrats that the political system of their dreams didn't work anymore in the real world. Talk shows and Op-Ed pages were full of discussions about the "excess of democracy" that had led to political paralysis. President Bush's popularity plummeted. Several states held referendums on limiting the terms of public officials, and voters in California and Colorado passed them with relish. Vice President Quayle rode the limitations idea for the Republican right and Bush endorsed it at the opportune moment, his favorite time of day.

What better antidote to excessive democracy, then, than war—its absolute antithesis? War implies command rather than participation, obedience over agreement, hierarchy instead of equality, repression not liberation, uniformity not diversity, secrecy not candor, propaganda not information. And the war state is so much more *efficient* than the quasi-democratic model practiced here, with its paralyzing quarrels, its contentious factions (also known during recent election campaigns as "special interests"), its occasional ideological loop-de-loops and its famous bad bargains.

"One reason the war was so popular," Vermont's Independent/Socialist Representative Bernie Sanders said recently, "was that something real happened over there—the military mobilization, moving half a million troops in a few weeks or months, was staggering; the war was fought quickly, effectively. Contrast that with politics, where you can't do anything, where nothing real seems to happen. And especially with last October, when the political structure was seen to be unmovable."

What's more, the war allowed Bush to clear the national political forum of all arguments that interrupted his monologue before the American people. There would be only one item on the agenda. The budget debacle was dismissed. The

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S&L mess disappeared. Civil rights, child care, drugs, health and education, recession and economic competitiveness were dropped for the duration. Yellow ribbons replaced democratic dialogue. The media defined the good fight and then enlisted as loyal lieutenants of the warrior *kommando*.

Of course, much of Bush's success in waging war and managing consent was dumb luck. As someone wrote last winter, "Even a blind pig will finally find his feed." Saddam was an unambiguous villain, a stupid strategist, an incompetent statesman—and a military weakling, whose vaunted arms and armies were never a match for those of the world's sole surviving superpower. It didn't matter that the air war took longer and did less than was expected, or that the heroic Patriots sometimes hit Scud rockets and let the lethal warheads get through. The doctrine of overwhelming force allowed for a large amount of wasted weaponry and effort.

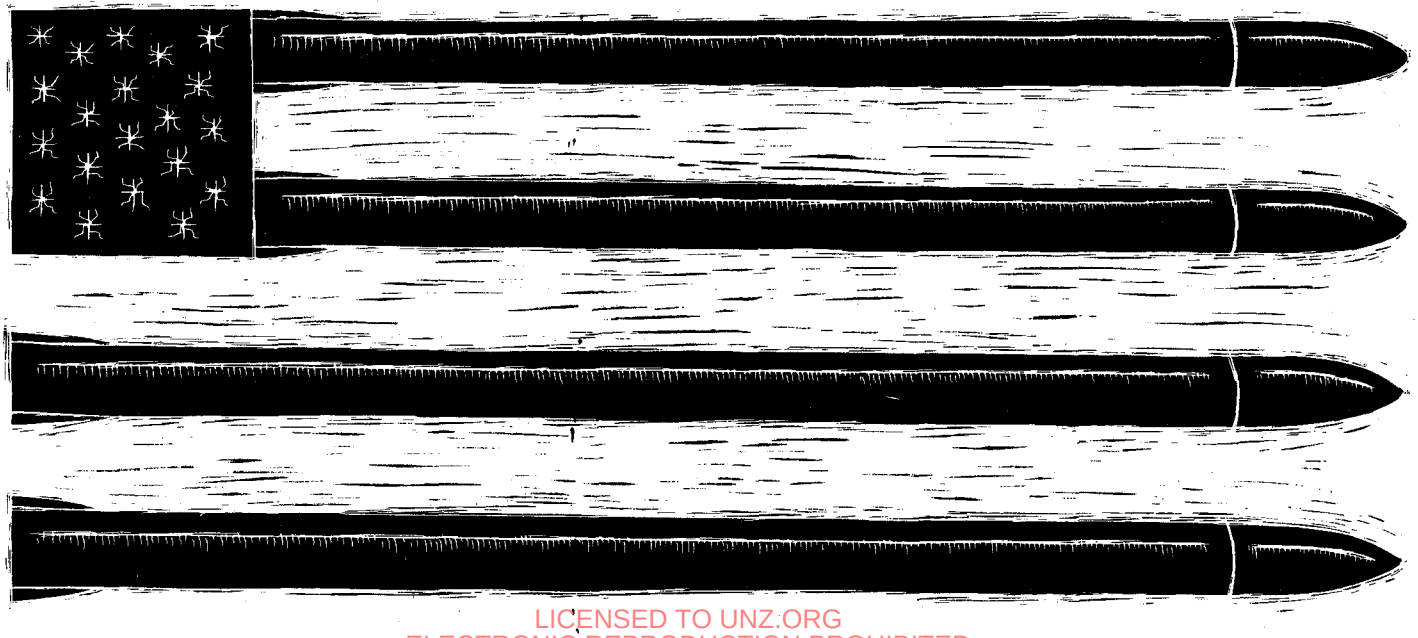
But luck wasn't all Bush had. Since Vietnam the U.S. military has indeed been learning its lessons and perfecting its management, and not only in the artistry of death. The Pentagon's public relations campaign—of which straightforward press censorship was only a small part—has yet to be fully exposed, but when it is, we will see how brilliantly the propagandists performed according to plans drawn over a decade. Every P.R. ploy was planned and executed like—well, like a Republican presidential operation in the age of Deaver, Teeter and Hill and Knowlton. This time, there would be no media-dumb generals blinking at cameras and lamely discerning lights at the end of tunnels. Heeeeere's Stormin' Norman! Color! Laughs! Emotion! Home video sales (forty-five minutes of the general's "final briefing") are brisk.

Even before the 100-hour ground rout and subsequent cease-fire, admirers of the gulf campaign began to think about ways to bring the war home. If America could be so successful in the desert (and in the P.R. effort), why not harness those arts and crafts to domestic affairs? A key document was provided by Anthony Cordesman, ABC's on-camera android for strategic affairs. Square-jawed, tight-lipped and broad-shouldered, wearing clear aviator glasses that somehow seemed molded to his face, Cordesman looked as if he was chiseled from a mountain somewhere out West and wheeled onto the set of *World News Tonight* for his electronic chalk-talks and chilling military scenarios. On February 28, he dipped into print with a *New York Times* Op-Ed celebration of "America's new military culture," with its "implied . . . new civil-military relationship." In other words, America had won because politics was no longer in command—the warriors had taken over.

Cordesman worried that the wimps and appeasers and pound-foolish cheapskates in Congress would cut military spending after the war and thus throw the civil-military relationship off kilter. He did not, however, finish his thought. Money is a good way to keep the military in power, but it is not sufficient to militarize the entire political structure, to extend the combat culture to the social sphere. To accomplish that, heavy ideological work is required—starting, perhaps, with the destruction of the opposition (*any* opposition) as a legitimate political force. Republican water-carriers started that process while the bombs were still falling. As Bush made a show of bipartisanship and political generosity, the President's men tore into Democrats who had voted in January to postpone the shooting war. The media did their best to marginalize the antiwar movement (no big deal) and to bring the emotions of patriotism and militarism into every home with nonstop blather about our boys and girls at the front. Peace protesters never got their point across that the best way to protect our troops was to bring them home, for the goal was not protection but glorification.

Hovering over this landscape of authority, arms and ecstasy was a faint, familiar odor. "There's more than a whiff of fascism," Bernie Sanders said ruefully. More enthusiastically, columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak began to portray George Bush as a President from Valhalla: "There is something more," they swooned, "intangible and mystical, in the new relationship that now appears to bind the president and his country, affording him precious new strength." Further historical annotation seems superfluous.

For years there has been a small but influential intellectual lobby for limits on democracy. The Buckleyite, Birchist "New



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Right" of the late 1950s and early 1960s yammered about America as a *republic* instead of a *democracy*, and they haven't stopped yet—see columns by Pat Buchanan and his kind. They still awaken from nightmares of the French Revolution, with visions of mob rule and the tyranny of unpropertied classes. More sophisticated political scientists, many of them self-styled liberals on certain issues, became enamored of authoritarian rule when studying Third World development and "nation building." Democracy in corruption-ridden, slothful, underdeveloped lands simply didn't "work." Many of those types were designers of America's policy in Vietnam. In particular, Harvard's Samuel Huntington, widely known by his sobriquet "Mad Dog," is always pushing for more command and less participation (one of his favorite political parables involves the comparison of the efficient, military-run U.S. Military Academy with the sloppy, citizen-run neighboring town of West Point).

Bush's eagerness to criminalize Saddam, and his desire to bring him to trial, are part of the overall strategy of identifying the police and military functions of the state.

We will soon see how the mystical leader will use his precious new strength to impose a civil-military relationship—indeed, a new order—on his own country, as he says he will do for the rest of the world. It is not clear that America is ready for *Bushismus*. The elaborate antecedents of authoritarianism in the Axis countries before World War II, and in many Third World states today, are simply not present in the United States. There seems to be no historical logic nor, yet, an urgent economic need for a rigid new order.

But popular frustration is growing, and the structural faults in the political economy are widening. James William Gibson, author of the trenchant book on Vietnam *The Perfect War*, has been working on a new study about the post-Vietnam culture, with its "warrior dreams." He says, "This [the victory in the gulf] is the culmination of the dream, what we read in Tom Clancy's technothrillers that have been so popular, the rejuvenation of the system by high-tech systems. Well, they got it. It's a very magical time. Americans hope that this will return us to a pre-Vietnam past, that the wicked spell has been broken. It's another example of America being regenerated through violence. But how long can cheap oil prices keep the structural problems from coming to a head?"

An indication of what may be in store for the country came in early March, when Bush proposed that local police forces take a leaf from the gulf war book and "take back the streets and liberate our neighborhoods from the tyranny of fear." The Administration's crime bill that was then introduced would further emulate the style of war by eliminating a whole roster of civil liberties for "suspects" in criminal proceedings (i.e., enemy soldiers) and extend the death penalty as a way of institutionalizing state violence (i.e., indiscriminate bombing).

At the moment, such methods may be limited to minority ghettos at home and to Third World countries, while the middle classes and the elite enjoy the same kind of liberties they've always had. The show and threat of violence will still be used by America's leaders (mystical or mediocre) to impose order, only instead of communists the perceived enemy will be criminals—local hoods and international outlaws, like Manuel Noriega and Saddam Hussein. Bush's eagerness to criminalize Saddam, and his desire (now suppressed?) to bring him to trial, are part of the overall strategy of identifying the police and military functions of the state. There's a war on drugs, a war on crime and a war on international aggression. We are the world's military policeman. Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates, who has instituted a repressive regime in minority communities as harsh as any police state in the world, is Bush's idea of an "all-American hero." According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Bush recently recalled that he stood with the Chief last year "looking out over a neighborhood where they reclaimed their streets, their kids, their future." So now may he stand with General Schwarzkopf, looking out over another neighborhood in the sand, where the U.S. world police have imposed another military reclamation.

The ghettos may be ungovernable now except by faux fascist methods, but the "talking classes" will not feel the jackboot or the lash until the need arises. Prosperity is a good guard against repression. But here the experience of war may not be so productive. Although in relative terms the gulf expedition cost little (one analyst thinks the Pentagon may "break even" on the operation, what with third-party contributions, creative bookkeeping and inventory depletion), over the long term it is part of a prescription for decline, not renewal. While America's competitors (Germany and Japan) continued to build their productive economies, America turned again to military concerns. If such tendencies persist and the policy managers go into world policing in a big way, any hope for economic reconstruction must be abandoned.

America learned that it can do war well. The temptation now is to apply that skill to areas where, of late, it has done poorly: the development of a prosperous, lawful and just society. That is precisely where militarism would be disastrously inappropriate. This may be a magical time for the warrior dreamers, but it is a moment of maximum danger for everyone else. □

FORMER *NATION* INTERNS

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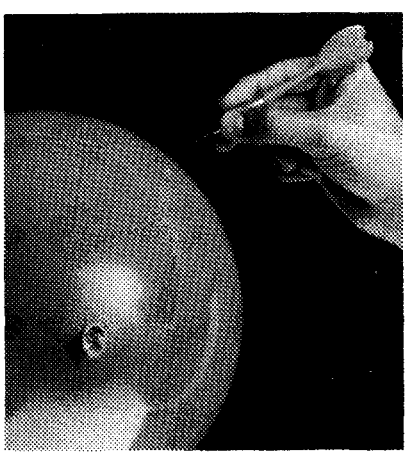

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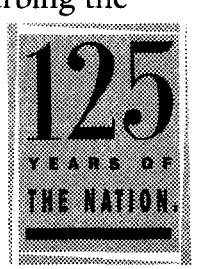

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READING AROUND.

ELIZABETH POCHODA

This is the first of what will be a monthly column devoted to periodicals. Advance copies of publications may be sent for consideration to: Elizabeth Pochoda, The Nation, *72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011.*

Bus Fare

Like the buses on Fifth Avenue, slick magazines travel in packs. Examples of passengers accorded first-class feature treatment in recent issues, for instance, include producer David Geffen (profiles in **Vanity Fair, GQ** and **Spy**); former producer Julia Phillips (interviewed, discussed and invited to write in numerous places as a consequence of her Hollywood confessional, *You'll Never Eat Lunch in This Town Again*); movie star Jodie Foster (**US, Premiere, Mirabella, Entertainment Weekly** and many more); the late rock star Jim Morrison (**Esquire** and **Rolling Stone** cover stories, inside features nearly everywhere else); and the newly minted intellectual celebrity Camille Paglia (cover stories in **New York** and **Harper's**).

The April issues just out suggest that the celebrity shuttle can be rerouted if something inescapably important—like a war—pops up. The long lead time of monthlies (whose editors had to run something on the conflict with Iraq in case the bombs were still bursting when their publications hit the stands) left **Esquire** running three features from the front, and **Mirabella, Harper's, Rolling Stone** and **GQ** one each. All nicely written and packaged, most of these stories nevertheless read like pieces that would have been pulled had anyone known the desert storm would abate so quickly. (Readers can mull the prospects of death in the sand, finding God in a foxhole, Baghdad by bomblight and Koranic attitudes about "liberated women"—including a report about panties that never made it back from the laundry.) You could argue that nothing journalistically remarkable came out of the Vietnam War in its first month, either. But you would still be left with that briefing-room feeling that military censorship, plus editorial uneasiness about looking outdated, plus an almost tangible sense in the print world that maybe the press *did* lose Vietnam made these first-person accounts so unsingular. Even P.J. O'Rourke, writing in **Rolling Stone**, commits to not much more than conventional racist observations about the propensity of Arabs to litter and drive like maniacs. But there's another reason these dispatches don't read like Michael Herr's: Writers are not much encouraged to report on issues or scenes right now. The idea everywhere is to find a person on whom to hang the tale. So, back to the main event, the profile. Done well (which often entails taking a busman's holiday from the pack) it can make a difference. Look back at Leslie Bennetts's devastating dissection of William Bennett in the March **Vanity Fair**. Ditto Paul Schneider's profile of Edith Jones, who is still high on Bush's list for a seat on the Supreme Court, in the March **Mirabella**. This month? Nothing as good as those, though you'd like to think that Philip Weiss's cover story on Ellen Barkin in **Esquire** would put an end to celebrity voyeurism for a long time to come. It won't, but it's worth quoting anyway.

> Barkin: Do you plan to do a lot of celebrity interviews?
> Weiss: No. A lot of celebrities are dumb, I think.
> Barkin (a little later): Maybe the writers are dumb. And maybe they asked the actors dumb questions.

There's more and smarter stuff from her, but that passage gets to the heart of the matter. Weiss wants you to like him for letting himself look dumb and prurient, yet honest; but the credit belongs to Barkin, who shows she's the one who knows what this game is all about. Elsewhere on the celebrity spectrum is another woman with the right attitude, Madonna. Lynn Hirshberg's profile in the current **Vanity Fair** captures a star who is both a genius at publicity and a cunning warrior in the celebrity's battle against the tyranny of the articulate interviewer. This time the interviewer respects the distance. Keep these two conversations and throw away the rest.

Extra Mileage

Harper's: Two selections from the Readings section: Gerald Graff's "Debate the Canon in Class" (reprinted from *New Literary History*) refines his often stated position on solving the crisis in academia by debating the issues in front of students, but adds the refreshing warning that all sides—feminist, traditionalist, structuralist or Marxist—by now are bound to seem hopelessly remote to the majority of students. Better address that fact first. Also, for those mystified by the men's movement, Tom Daly's "Male Bonding" (reprinted from *Wingspan*) tells you pretty much what you need to know in many fewer words than Robert Bly's windy best seller, *Iron John*. Maybe it's a parody, but I don't think so. See for yourself. **Esquire**: Robert Katz loves a good art-world mystery and his piece on the complex fate of Willem de Kooning is just that. Sallie Tisdale's "It's Been Real" in the same issue makes a beginning, but barely a beginning, in exposing the Virtual Reality fad for the technoweenie bit of hucksterism it is. **Vanity Fair**: I wouldn't argue for its politics, but Marie Brenner's profile of oilman Oscar Wyatt reminds you that there's no story like a Texas story. **Rolling Stone** gives Bret Easton Ellis a lot of space to defend *American Psycho*, with good and bad results. Good because he scores some points off his more hysterical critics. Bad because watching him explain the meaning of his book is a little like watching a hanging. **M Inc** is usually worth buying if there's something by Michael Lewis inside. Since *Liar's Poker* he's been reporting on things Japanese. This time out his description of Tokyo businessmen over here on a visit is amusing and has a characteristically ironic twist at the end. Finally, to end where we started, with journalists and stars, **Mirabella**'s profile of biographer Kitty Kelley makes the really big case for celebrity journalism. Asked why she has done a book on Nancy Reagan instead of on the President, Kelley replies, "This *is* a book about the president. This explains why your country was run the way it was for eight years." Reliable rumors say Kelley's book describes a romantic liaison between Frank Sinatra and Nancy in the White House. We'll have to wait and see what that explains about those eight years.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

No Promised Land

ERIC FONER

SOMEWHAT MORE INDEPENDENT: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770–1810. *By Shane White. University of Georgia. 278 pp. $35.*

It is no secret that race relations in New York City are at a low ebb. Even more ominous than highly publicized incidents of violence in Howard Beach, Bensonhurst and Central Park is the fact that daily interactions between black and white New Yorkers have become tinged with fear, anger and sullen resentment. One index of how bad things have become may be found in the pseudo-enlightened pages of *New York* magazine, where columnist Joe Klein routinely fulminates against blacks for failing to emulate the economic success of the city's immigrant groups, and for destroying the racial harmony of the civil rights era. The one word that never seems to enter into Klein's discussions, or those of other voices of today's ex-liberal white backlash, is racism.

When the present becomes too depressing, people have a tendency to locate imaginary golden ages in the past. And much of the current discussion of New York race relations assumes that racial conflict is something new. Wasn't New York historically a city of racial liberalism? Isn't today's tension and violence some kind of aberration?

The answer, unfortunately, is no. New York is a city whose rise to commercial pre-eminence before the Civil War rested in large measure on shipping the cotton grown by slave labor. On its streets Afro-Americans, some of them relatives of men serving in the United States Army, were hunted down and murdered during the 1863 draft riots. In the 1920s and 1930s, many businesses, whether on stylish Fifth Avenue or in bohemian Greenwich Village, refused to serve black patrons. And the city's housing and labor markets have always been segregated along racial lines.

Anyone who doubts that racial inequality is as much a part of New York's history as a Nathan's hot dog has only to read Shane White's new book. White, who teaches American history at the University of Sydney in Australia, has written the most comprehensive account now available of the abolition of slavery in New York City. His most striking findings, however, concern not the process of emancipation but the extent of New York's involvement with slavery in the colonial and revolutionary periods.

It will surely come as a surprise to most readers, even professional historians, that for most of the eighteenth century, New York City had more slaves than any American city except Charleston, South Carolina. In 1771, one New Yorker in seven was a black slave. Even more striking, the nearby agricultural counties depended more heavily on slave labor than any region north of the Mason-Dixon line. The first national census, in 1790, reported that nearly 40 percent of the white households in Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island—then the city's rural hinterland—owned at least one slave (about the same proportion as in Maryland and South Carolina).

This melancholy chapter in the city's history ought to be a starting point for those who seek to understand New Yorkers today.

In the city itself, one-fifth of the white families in 1790 were slaveholders. Not a single street in New York lacked at least one slave resident. The richer New Yorkers were, the more likely they were to own slaves. But large numbers of artisans did so as well, and unlike merchants' slaves, who mostly labored as domestic servants, those belonging to artisans tended to be skilled craftsmen.

The extent of artisan slaveholding is one of White's most provocative findings. It ought to give pause to a generation of historians (myself included) who have idealized the artisans of the early Republic as emblems of republican independence. Artisan independence clearly rested on the coerced labor of others, fatally compromising the egalitarian thrust of their social outlook. The early labor movement, for example, originated within the artisan class in the 1830s. By then slavery was dead, but it continued to cast a long shadow—the city's first unions excluded blacks from membership.

New York, of course, was not a plantation region, and its slave population was far smaller than the South's. Slavery was not the foundation of the economy, as it was in Virginia and South Carolina, and most New York slaveholders owned only one or two slaves. Conscious of these differences, white New Yorkers persuaded themselves that they had created a "mild" form of slavery. In some ways they were right. Slaves did not work under the rigid discipline of a plantation gang, and found it easier than in the South to purchase their freedom, and even, on occasion, veto a new owner when being sold.

But, as White points out, New York's slaves did not consider their masters particularly benevolent, for they ran away in large numbers and organized at least two insurrections during the eighteenth century. As his careful analysis of the city's newspapers and advertisements for runaways makes clear, brutality by New York slaveholders was hardly unknown. Moreover, the very dispersal of the black population because of the small size of slaveholdings made black family life even more fragile than in the South and limited opportunities for the creation of the kind of semi-independent slave culture that flourished on the plantations.

Nor did the city's slaveholders seem particularly plagued by guilt, or bothered by the patent contradiction between slavery and the professed ideals of the American Revolution. In Virginia and Maryland, the Revolution inspired a rash of voluntary manumissions, but New York recorded only seventy-six between 1783 and 1800—hardly a surge of egalitarian conscience. The Revolution did spawn the New York Manumission Society, but many of its upper-crust members neglected to liberate their own bondsmen. (As late as 1800, the society's president, John Jay, Chief Justice of the United States, owned five slaves.)

It took until 1799 for New York's legislature to pass the Gradual Manumission Act. The emphasis was on "gradual," for the law freed no living slave. It decreed that all children henceforth born to slave

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women were to be free after serving their owners into adulthood, thus compensating slaveholders for the future infringement of their property rights. The slaves received no compensation for their years of unrequited labor.

Despite its limitations, the act inspired an increase in manumissions and led to a rapid decline in slavery in the city (although the institution held on tenaciously for a decade or more in the surrounding rural areas). But not until 1827 did New York slavery come to an end entirely.

White's success in delineating the importance of slavery to the city's development and in tracing the process of its decline makes the book's shortcomings all the more disappointing. The book's somewhat arbitrary structure—the first section, entitled "Whites," examines slavery and emancipation, while the second, "Blacks," explores the lives of the black population—makes it impossible to trace out the constant interactions that in New York, as elsewhere, formed part of slavery.

The discussion of the culture and life style of the growing free black community in the early nineteenth century contains fascinating tidbits about black language, dress, hairstyles and physical mannerisms, but it fails to sustain the claim that "a distinctive black culture" had emerged in the city (even less evidence supports White's claim to have discovered "a female culture" among New York's free blacks). Overall, the book raises many provocative questions and touches suggestively on a host of issues, but at little more than 200 pages of text it is simply too brief to delve into most of them extensively.

It is a pity, moreover, that White concludes his story around 1810, just as the free black community was undergoing a profound transformation. White describes the early years of the nineteenth century as a brief era of optimism and promise, when a considerable number of former slaves labored as skilled artisans or managed to set up small retail businesses, and the widespread use of the term "citizens of color" suggested that blacks had been accepted as part of the new Republic's body politic.

In 1821, however, New York's constitutional convention, which eliminated property requirements for white voters, simultaneously imposed a prohibitive qualification on blacks. In effect, race (along with gender) replaced class as the definition of republican citizenship. Soon blacks would be forced out of the skilled trades; by the 1850s the vast majority worked as personal servants or common laborers. Meanwhile, white immigrants who flooded the city beginning in the 1830s not only freely exercised the suffrage but enjoyed access to jobs entirely denied to blacks.

Indeed, along with the idea of New York as a city free from racism, the history of the black community shatters another common myth—that blacks' poverty in our own time results from their arrival in the city as "the last of the immigrants." Actually, as White demonstrates, blacks were not the last immigrants but among the first. But successive waves of white immigrants enjoyed rights and opportunities denied to generations of Afro-Americans, whether slave or free.

Ultimately, New York's race relations reflect trends in the larger society—whether in the America of Reagan and Bush or in the era of slavery and emancipation. The consolidation of racism in nineteenth-century New York, alluded to briefly at the close of White's account, cannot be explained simply by looking at the city's history, for it reflected developments in the evolution of American society at large: the increasingly racial definition of citizenship, the enrichment of the national economy by the expansion of the South's Cotton Kingdom, and a process of territorial expansion that involved the dispossession of one nonwhite people (Native Americans) and the brutal conquest of another (Mexicans).

Democracy, economic growth, westward expansion—these central themes of American growth all took on a decidedly racist character. New York, the nation's premier commercial center, could hardly remain untouched. An understanding of this melancholy chapter in the city's—and America's—history ought to be a starting point for those who seek to understand how New Yorkers arrived at the dismal state of affairs in which they find themselves today. □

Supreme Being in Russia

ARTHUR C. DANTO

1913: In February, Malevich tells Matiushin that the only meaningful direction for painting is that of Cubo-Futurism.
—Joop M. Joosten, "Chronology" in Kazimir Malevich: 1878–1935

When the winds of aesthetic doctrine blow across the medium of artistic production, the surface is formed into waves, or movements. Groups of artists, often unacquainted with one another, begin making works that appear to belong to a single defining impulse. These, rather than the lives of individual artists, are the basic units of art history, though too little is understood of what one might term the undular mechanics of such surface perturbations to pretend that we know very much about what causes the swells, the crests, the breakers and the foam tides—or for that matter what accounts for the attenuation of movements when they at last subside. All that we know is that we have grown accustomed to view the history of art in terms of the sweep of such movements, of which there must, in the past century and a half, have been hundreds and hundreds. An author I once met, whose project is the history of manifestoes, told me she had collected upward of 500 of these, each presumably defining the ideological spume of a distinct movement, however fleeting. And there must have been any number of others that swept unmanifestoed across the present and into the archives, borne witness to by scraps of colored cardboard intended to convey in nonverbal terms the new aesthetic and its transformative implications for human consciousness.

"If there were no wind, there would be no waves," the treatises say, which must then mean, since there are no movements to speak of in the art world today, that (improbable as it sounds) that world has run out of wind, since the rate of artistic production continues undiminished. Of course, the claim of surface calm may be disputed. The art world is never without its volatilities. But the bulk of contemporary effervescence has less to do with artistic movement as such than with what we might think of as the artistic wings of political and social movements possessing their own drives and urgencies. The current debates over quality, for example, given prominence in an important essay by Michael Brenson in *The New York Times* last November, or over censorship, or even over pluralism, are but translations into aesthetic terms of larger and more important controversies having to do with claims and counterclaims on rights, liberties, privileges, justice and the like. Now, it is true that artistic move-

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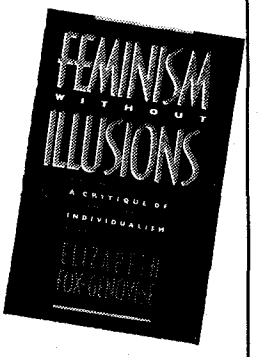
ments have almost always been associated with political and spiritual agendas and visions of new social orders. The Pre-Raphaelites, for example, imagined an entire revision of industrial society together with their imperatives of visual truth. Minimalism, perhaps the last of the great modern movements, was internally related to a critique of social institutions and was never merely the vehicle of some particularly austere doctrine of form. But in all these cases—Surrealism and Futurism are two further examples—it was art itself that was believed to be the fulcrum of the revolution. By contrast, I should think, relatively few feminists would see in art as such the chief agency for resolving the injustices of gender. Rather, the injustices of the larger world would be present, predictably, in the institutions of the art world, and their rectification there would be but the political agenda for that particular front, among many. My sense is that the faith in art as a primary means and agency of spiritual transformation has almost totally vanished, and that this explains the vanishing of art movements as such. Art today is pretty much just art. The winds that stirred the waters into waves were those of higher promises and almost religious assurance.

This was certainly true of the movement in the Russian avant-garde of around 1915 that entered—and remade—art history under the name of Suprematism. Its founder and chief exponent, Kazimir Malevich, was perfectly clear that his was not simply the latest and perhaps the final style of advanced painting but, as the very meaning of the term "supreme" implies, that the ultimate of art had been attained through Suprematism, beyond which, accordingly, nothing could be imagined that was *art*. Something beyond art, however, and higher than art—for which what we might call "suprematizing" was the way and the means—*could* be imagined. "My new painting does not belong solely to the earth," Malevich wrote in his characteristic prophetic idiom. "The earth has been abandoned like a house, it has been decimated. Indeed, man feels a great yearning for space, an impulse to 'break free from the globe of the earth.' " To enter a Suprematist painting, accordingly, would not be like entering a Renaissance painting, whose spaces were those of the earth, filled with people and trees and houses and mountains. It was, rather, to enter a stratosphere of the spirit, beyond the cognitive limits that define earthbound existence. Inevitably, given the most advanced technology available to him for metaphorical extravagance, Malevich thought of his activity in the idiom of aviation. "I have torn through the blue lampshade of color limitations, and have come out into the white; follow me, comrade aviators sail into the chasm—I have set up the semaphores of Suprematism."

Suprematism was, in Malevich's vision, a system of artistic practice—"a hard, cold system, unsmilingly set in motion by philosophical thought." Its artistic form was a kind of nonobjective painting in which, typically, simplified colored forms were deployed against a neutral white background. But the prepositional "against" is somewhat misleading. What Malevich intended is that these forms—triangles, slightly irregular bars, squares or circles—should be perceived as floating in a kind of cosmic space, emblems of having broken free of the earth, metaphors for a form of spiritual flotation. I take it that they were meant as more than abstract illustrations of a spiritual condition, however. They were meant to be liberating for the viewer, who was, through them, to find a way into those very spaces, to float, in effect, among other forms. So it was, beyond a system of artistic practice, to be understood as a system of spiritual exercises. I am uncertain whether Malevich used "suprematize" as a verb, but if it can be one, then suprematizing takes up where art has attained its limits. To suprematize is to exist in a higher dimension of spiritual fulfillment than earthly life allows.

It is, I think, exceedingly difficult for a viewer of today to see these often gaily colored showers of form, distributed like confetti across white canvases, pleasing to the eye and to the sense of design, as being dense with the kinds of meanings and means to the states of awakened spirituality that Malevich expected them to be. In part, of course, this is because, however startling nonobjective painting must have appeared in 1915 when Malevich was showing Suprematist works, a long history of abstraction stands between us and those exhibitions. And this history inevitably mutes their energy, and diffuses it, as we view them through the subsequent evolution of abstraction as an artistic commonplace. And in a way, we see them as well as merely examples of a style of design to which they in fact gave rise. *The Oxford Dictionary of Art* closes its entry on Suprematism by saying that "although his direct followers in Russia



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were of minor account, Malevich had great influence on the development of art and design in the West." Nietzsche once wrote, "I listened for an echo, and heard only applause." Malevich might similarly have lamented, "I looked for fellow aviators and saw designers instead." A man who gives the grandiose name of Suprematism to his work, who defines his life as one of suprematizing, who felt he had broken through boundaries that had imprisoned human consciousness and who had embarked upon a new exploration of an unimagined space, would hardly be consoled by the assurance that his designs were stunning. In fact, they are so successful as designs that they stand in the way of being perceived as the Suprematisms they were supposed to be.

Because Suprematisms are almost always handsome and bright, they suffer the sort of dilemma a particularly beautiful man or woman must who really wants to be taken seriously as a thinker. It is as though anyone that beautiful must be frivolous and content to be but ornamental. Books on modern art will frequently display something by Malevich on their covers, not alone because his designs exemplify the sort of work to be discussed within but because they are such wonderful embellishments. And often they are discussed as merely that. Consider, for example, the classic study by Alfred H. Barr Jr., *Cubism and Abstract Art*, reissued a few years ago as a paperback by Harvard University Press. The cover illustration is identified as "Suprematist Composition: Red Square and Black Square." The title could not be more descriptive: A black square is placed squarely in the upper left quadrant of a white rectangle, higher than it is wide, while beneath it, and set at an angle, is a somewhat smaller red square. Barr's text was a pioneering one, as was the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, of which he was the director, and for which the text served as catalogue. Barr was indeed among the first to purchase Malevich in any quantity, and he deserves all sorts of credit. Still, it is instructive to read how his text treats the work. "A study in equivalents," Barr writes: "the red square, smaller but more intense in color and more active on its diagonal axis, holds its own against the black square which is larger but negative in color and static in position." This is formalist criticism in its pure state: A work of art is treated in the terms we learn to use in classes in design, if we are artists, or in art appreciation, if we are viewers. It is as if Malevich had brought off a particularly fine solution to a problem of color, shape and placement, viz., "Given two squares of different sizes and colors, compose them in such a way that the smaller holds its own against the larger." It would be difficult to explain the subtitle of the work against this reduced way of describing it: "Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension." The "fourth dimension" was a kind of promised land for geometrical cranks in the early years of this century, but without reference to it *as* a dimension, the work collapses into merely felicitous design. Barr's is really an almost classic docent's minilecture. But because the way of looking at abstract art—at any art—that it embodies has become the official way of looking at and thinking about art, it is hardly matter for wonder that we are blind, or numb, to what justified Malevich's art in his own eyes.

It is hardly matter for wonder that we are blind to what justified Malevich's art in his own eyes.

A Suprematism of 1920 brightens the jacket of Roger Lipsey's *An Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth Century Art*, which Lipsey describes in the body of the text in terms that would have been acceptable to Barr:

> A great black triangle, bisecting three freely aligned orange-red bars, floats in quiet equilibrium above an orange-red form, not quite a regular square. There is nothing more, apart from the blank sheet of paper that reads as undifferentiated space. Design, one might say—a happy juxtaposition of form and color that creates visual drama by 'floating' a heavy form in a spacious environment. The slight wobble of the beams contrasts nicely with the axial alignment of triangle and square and accentuates the floating sensation. And one is done; one has seen the work and is ready to move on.

But Lipsey, one of the rare writers sensitive to the spiritualist impulses in much of early modern art, impulses occluded by the radical formalism of recent decades, does not move on. He pauses, contemplates, and bit by bit there registers upon him what he speaks of as "some magic more difficult to define than the visual order of the work." He cites a striking phrase of Malevich: "We must prepare ourselves by prayer to embrace the sky." And he begins to feel Suprematism, surely as Malevich would have wished him to, as something that embodies another order of reality in the way an icon does when one believes the saint to be, as Byzantine theorists insisted, mystically present in his or her images. Icons and Suprematisms express the same order of immanence, and if indeed there is a passion for formal purity, this is but a transformed and deflected passion for purity of a different order altogether. When the early modernists spoke of the fourth dimension, they did so as if it were a plane orthogonal to earthly reality, onto which we might enter as transfigured beings. The question is not whether we want to share these beliefs but whether we can understand the art without knowing how the art was driven by those beliefs.

It is very much, in Suprematism but not only there, as if the pursuit of nonobjectivity were the secular counterpart to the mystic's effort to slip the finite world and enter into oneness with the one. Malevich expresses himself exactly in these terms:

> In the year 1913 in my desperate struggle to free art from the ballast of the objective world I fled to the form of the Square and exhibited a picture which was nothing more or less than a black square upon a white background. The critics moaned and with them the public: "Everything we loved is lost: We are in a desert. . . . Before us stands a black square on a white ground."

Black Square certainly did achieve the status of a kind of icon in the minds of Malevich's sympathizers, and in a photograph of "The Last Futurist Exhibition" of 1915, we can see it displayed, hanging not flat against the wall but at an angle across the meeting of two walls, up near the ceiling, in the position, according to scholars, that the chief icon in a traditional household would occupy. In another photograph, of Malevich laid out in state just after his death, the Black Square is shown hanging just above the artist, not flat against the wall, like the other painting with which he is surrounded, but leaning over him, as if in solicitude. Malevich was cremated in a Suprematist coffin, and his grave is marked with a white cube on which is a black

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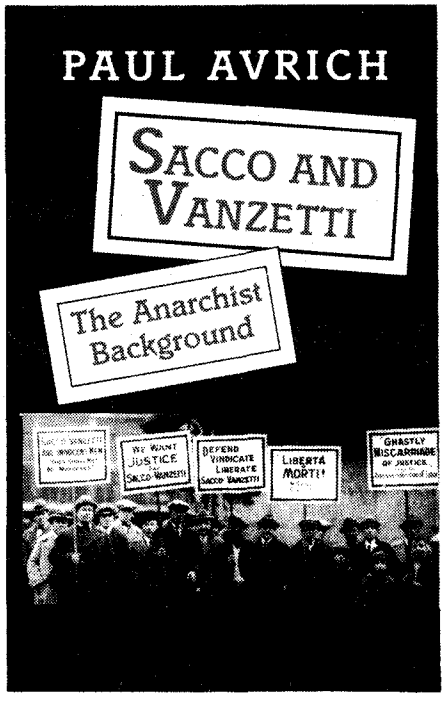
square. His last paintings, not in any obvious way Suprematist works but strange and unsettlingly traditional portraits, bear the Black Square as signature. It is clear that whatever the Black Square may have meant in the shuttle of influences, to Malevich and to those close enough to him to think about his life and death and art, the image was bound up with meanings of the most profound spiritual nature. Needless to say, not everyone was prepared to see it in such terms. There are always deflationist critics, one of whom put it down as "the greatest by far among the fairground tricks of instant culture." But for Malevich, the Black Square was "depicted with the greatest expressiveness and according to the laws of art."

The original Black Square is not to be seen in the magnificent exhibition of Malevich's work organized by Angelica Rudenstine, which was scheduled to be on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art until March 24. It is evidently too fragile for travel, but there are two bold Black Squares done at later times, one of them the same dimensions as it. There is as well a Red Square from 1915, and the supreme Suprematism, the notorious and intoxicating White Square on White of 1918, which is among the defining works of the Museum of Modern Art. Each of the squares is somewhat subversive of what one might think of as conduct appropriate to the order of squares. Black Square, for example, is fiendishly unparallel to the geometrically correct square upon which it floats. Red Square is rather vehemently skewed, as if it had not yet attained squarehood, or had just escaped the confines of equiangularity. And the White Square virtually dances on one of its corners in the abstract whiteness of the containing White Square. Each has some distinct meaning and personality, and the sequence from black through red to white obviously connotes some complex itinerary. We have the evidence of his death, however, for the thesis that it was the Black Square that retained the greatest meaning for Malevich until the end.

The exhibition seems a little anthology of the successive movements of modernism, through the medium of this single strong artistic personality. Malevich was an Impressionist, a Post-Impressionist, he passed through a phase of Art Nouveau, and he put on and discarded the stylistic vestments of Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Cubo-Futurism. Perhaps indeed these reflect his "desperate struggle to free art from the ballast of the



The Sacco-Vanzetti affair is the most famous and controversial case in American legal history. It divided the nation in the 1920s, and it has continued to arouse deep emotions, giving rise to an enormous literature. Few writers, however, have consulted anarchist sources for the wealth of information available there about the movement of which the defendants were a part. Now the preeminent American scholar of anarchism looks at the case from this new and valuable perspective.

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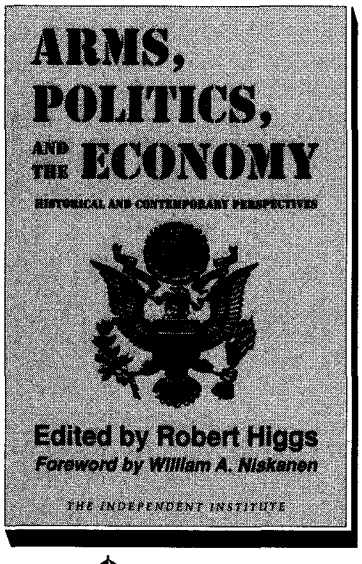
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galleries devoted to Suprematism, one has the sense that now this fiercely eclectic artist has become an abstractionist—until one realizes that here he is not responding to movements from abroad but has found his own. These works have a kind of exultation and triumph that communicate as joy. It is somewhat more difficult to know how to respond to the Post-Suprematist period in Malevich's life, with its stylized and often faceless peasants, which are succeeded by the altogether mystifying portraits in a Renaissance manner. The show concludes with a self-portrait in which the artist shows himself, to my eyes at least, as Christopher Columbus. He is wearing a biretta of Suprematist red, and his hand is cupped beneath an invisible globe. If this indeed is the interpretation of the work, nothing could have been a more fitting image for this great explorer of the deepest spaces—the artistic Admiral of the Ocean Sea. □

MUSIC.

GENE SANTORO

Country Comforts

More than any other American musical form, maybe more than any American genre but its cousin the movie western, country music is based on commercially generated nostalgia. The Grand Ole Opry, the industry's ideological centerpiece, has traded in it since its 1925 beginnings on Nashville's WSM. As Opry founder George Hay wrote of his audience, "They were hungry for the rhythm of the soil and the heart songs, plus the rural flavor and humor which spiced it." So while the salesmen for the National Life and Accident Insurance Company, WSM's owner, used free tickets to the Opry as icebreakers for their pitches, Hay exerted strict control over every aspect of his performers' presentation, from how they dressed and talked down to their biographies and politics and instrumentation. The Solemn Old Judge, as Hay was known, thus set the pattern that Nashville's country-music establishment follows to this day.

Although the past that country music evokes (almost invariably at the present's expense) is, like the movie cowboy, largely a fabrication, the music is also a mirror that reflects American history as it refracts the present through its guilty dream. Think, for example, of how clearly this nation's deep-seated anti-urban prejudices are outlined in country music. For every song about a soothing pastoral landscape, where even the hardest times can produce a transcendental moment via religion, family or true love, there's another about adulterous honky-tonkers adrift on a postindustrial sea of pain.

One aspect of that city-as-sinkhole-of-iniquity stance grows directly from the population displacements brought by the Great Depression and World War II. But another brokers a complex interaction of nativist myths. That strand begins with the Jefferson/Jackson mandate for a nation of sturdy white British yeoman farmers. It meanders through the Progressives' fear of European-immigrant hordes, who were mostly penned into large urban centers once they got here. It underlies the creation of our now-endangered system of national parks, conceived by the likes of John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt as places where beleaguered urbanites could plug into the healing forces of Nature. And it reflects the attitude of many contemporary Americans, who view the decay of our once-great cities with a sense of divinely ordained retribution and just plain glee.

Of course, a hundred years and more ago, back before country music was manufactured in L.A. (not coincidentally the world's movie capital) and Nashville, there were the hymns and ballads and schottisches and fiddle tunes and so on that the early WASP colonists brought with them, which became the roots of so much American popular music. Today, preservationist folkies—a too-often self-righteous and over-solemn lot who nevertheless perform an invaluable service—tend those roots. For what until the postwar era was disparaged as hillbilly music is as much a recent hybrid as any of its cousins, from blues and jazz to rock and rap. Like them, country music is an umbrella term sheltering a broad set of styles.

Country's historical interactions with other genres have been considerable, and the results have been diverse. More often than not, they've also been in defiance—at least initially—of the Nashville music establishment, unless they've served an obvious commercial purpose. (As a chronicle of the nervous insularity and negative attitude toward cultural/social innovation that marks the Athens of the South, Robert Altman's blistering epic *Nashville* is right on the money.) In the 1930s, for instance, Nashville pushed the tie-in with ersatz movie historicism that spawned the singing cowboy; the marriage was an obvious way to broaden its audiences. So too with the soft-focus Nashville Sound of the mid-1950s on: By glopping strings and chorales onto Tin Pan Alley lyrics, it responded to rock's commercial success, which knocked postwar crooners off the airwaves and thus opened a space where country could recoup its own sagging sales.

There are many other examples of musicians' matchmaking. A lot of the "old-time" music first recorded in the 1920s grew up side by side with the blues, which was being recorded at the same time; each showed the other's influence. Western swing grew out of big-band dance music and the popularity of the Hawaiian guitar. Honky-tonk, based largely in Texas and then in Bakersfield, California, was country's postwar analogue for the hardening beats and dislocated cries of electric urban blues. Rockabilly welded urban blues with the bluegrass revivalism that reacted against Nashville's poppier bent. In the 1960s, groups like Buffalo Springfield and the Byrds remated rock and honky-tonk, leading to still-prevalent country-rock. And the Austin-centered outlaw movement of the mid-1970s—actually a group of relocated, dissatisfied Nashville singer-songwriters—infused country with r&b, rock and Tex-Mex angles.

In time, Nashville (and its L.A. partners) accepted and capitalized on all these movements. That's the point when the myth-making machine has always kicked in. Outcasts become retrospective heroes; insiders are transformed into retrospective rebels. Approaches that were condemned by contemporaries as heretical become orthodoxy. The process can be almost as bizarre as watching Reagan and his Nauts laying claim to the mantles of Lincoln and F.D.R. But it's not nearly as fascinating as the rash of recent reissues that draw on country music's rich historical reservoir.

Almost at the beginning of what would become country music looms the Singing Brakeman, Jimmie Rodgers. *First Sessions, 1927–1928* and *The Early Years, 1928–1929* (Rounder) are the first two installments of what will be an eight-CD set compiled by Richard Weize, who's worked on some of the staggering multi-album compilations put out by Germany's Bear Family label. Rodgers dealt in a variant of what Ralph Peer, the legendary Victor talent scout who first recorded him, called "nigger blues." Though you could see him that way, as a kind of 1920s Elvis, Rodgers wasn't that unusual. White and black

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string bands of the time played overlapping repertories, for instance. (Interestingly, blues greats like B.B. King have cited Rodgers's recordings as influential.) While Rodgers's rhythms are usually less complex than most used by his blues contemporaries, his yodeling fluttered and bent notes in astonishing ways, which presaged both singing cowboys like Gene Autry and r&b greats like Aaron Neville. The exemplary recording quality and notes of this set make it a fine introduction to country's roots.

While it also does some of that, the five-CD *Columbia Country Classics* (Columbia) sits at the other end of the compilation spectrum. It's basically a solid, if obviously chosen, greatest-hits sampler that spans eras and styles, from old-timey to the current New Traditionalism. The good sound and in-depth notes by Rich Kienzle make each volume worth having for devotees, but to my admittedly prejudiced ears the music is far more uneven. The first two volumes, *The Golden Age* and *Honky Tonk Heroes*, reach from the Carter Family and Roy Acuff to Lefty Frizzell and Ray Price—by far the most attractive stuff, if only because it's less processed-sounding than what's to come. Volume 3, *Americana*, gathers novelty tunes like Fess Parker's "Ballad of Davy Crockett" alongside classics like Frizzell's "Long Black Veil" and swill like Charlie Daniels's "The Devil Went Down to Georgia." The last two CDs, *The Nashville Sound* and *A New Tradition*, demonstrate all too clearly the music's decline into formula.

The Country Music Foundation is Nashville's academic arm. It publishes learned monographs in *The Journal of Country Music*, for instance, and does serious historical research as well as public relations. In that way, it recapitulates some of the Music City's larger schizophrenia. So it's no surprise to find that its first five ventures into major-label partnership—the *Country Music Hall of Fame Series*, kicking off with *Ernest Tubb*, *Red Foley*, *Bill Monroe*, *Kitty Wells* and *Loretta Lynn* (MCA)—are meticulously annotated and well engineered. In this series, each CD is built around a well-conceived greatest-hits approach to an individual artist.

Tubb was Jimmie Rodgers's most fervent disciple, and Rodgers's widow, Carrie, helped him promote himself as the Blue Yodeler's successor. But he didn't hit until "Walking the Floor Over You," a genial proto-honky-tonker that landed him some roles in Hollywood. Most of his tunes are standard-issue country weepers, but a few of the more interesting ones stick closer to the blues he learned from Rodgers and elsewhere. And "Two Glasses, Joe" is a good example of the early honky-tonk surrounding Hank Williams.

Foley was one of the reasons country-music recording finally shifted from Chicago and New York studios to hometown Nashville after World War II. During the process, he shaped the mold by which the Nashville Sound homogenized what twang country's regional roots still had: He established, for instance, a group of session players who did "head" arrangements of tunes for everybody who recorded in the studio. Though these were accomplished musicians, a certain sameness settled—perhaps inevitably—over their work as they ground from session to session. This album, aside from its treacly sentiments, demonstrates that easygoing boredom.

Mandolin virtuoso Bill Monroe reached back to string bands to invent bluegrass, a bluesier version of old-timey music (like Rodgers, Monroe learned to play in part from black musicians). Pitting fiddle breakdowns against guitar, banjo, bass and Monroe's own vigorous picking, his Blue Grass Boys created a rhythmic filigree—not something any form of country is noted for—that he laced with his high-lonesome vocals in a kind of neo-Appalachian blues, complete with Rodgers-ish yodeling for punctuation. Nice as these selections are, however, none are drawn from what aficionados regard as the quintessential Blue Grass Boys—the 1945-48 group featuring banjo genius Earl Scruggs, guitarist Lester Flatt and fiddler Chubby Wise.

Wells embodies an older country-music female template—the stay-at-home woman who's gentle and understanding and righteous and tough and true and plaintive and passive and who usually, though not always, hangs by her man through whatever comes down. In other words, a familiar part: morality's underpowered arbiter. Newer country women like Lynn are allowed anger and divorces and even, lately, affairs of their own, although for Lynn's generation that role of moral guardian remained intact. Lynn, as the "Coal Miner's Daughter," personifies one of country's favorite fantasies, in which sturdy families overcome grinding poverty through strength of spirit. Her tunes also depict her spending a lot of time sparring with other women about

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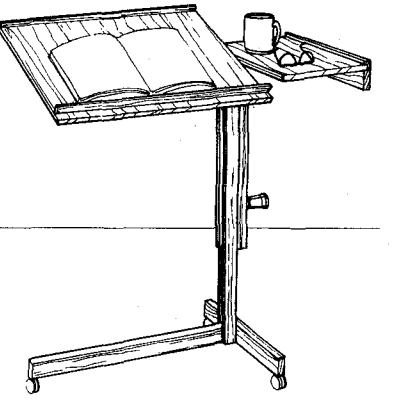

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just who's gonna get the man-in-the-middle. If the dull-witted morality plays aren't enough to make you skip these, imagine Wells's nasal dentist's-drill of a voice and Lynn's patented syrupy twang gracing the insipid, repetitive arrangements from *The Nashville Sound Handbook*, pages 54-62.

One of the most mythologized figures in country music is Hank Williams. Depending on the perspective of the storyteller, he was either Mr. Inside or Mr. Outside with the Nashville establishment and music critics—one of his least scrutinized accomplishments. I guess his composing talent, performing style, burn-it-at-both-ends life and resulting early death are flexible enough to be rhetorically useful to different camps.

Williams was probably closer to the cry of the blues than any country star since the Blue Yodeler himself. His tunes show it: A friend of mine once described them without irony as slit-your-wrists music. But in fact, Williams's craft drew on a host of influences, from Tin Pan Alley to raw gut-churning. So it was fascinating when, a couple of years back, Polydor's archivists issued an exhaustive eight-volume, sixteen-record set of his complete recorded output. Unfortunately, as satisfying as it was for critics and fanatics to listen to Williams's skills develop incrementally, for less dedicated or crazed types it was just exhausting and expensive. So now there's the well-annotated, excellent-sounding *The Original Singles Collection . . . Plus* (PolyGram), which, as three CDs, is more compact and cheaper but still cuts a pretty revealing cross section.

The power of Williams's songs comes from their apparently unadorned directness. Like all the best country tunes, they tell simple stories. No deep ironist, Williams churned out plenty of emotional mush in the country-weeper vein. But the jagged-edge aches that make you want to open your own veins—"I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," for instance—pivot around spare metaphors that pack a pain as seemingly artless as the torn yodels racking his voice on "Lovesick Blues" or "Long Gone Lonesome Blues."

Of course, like the best tunes of Jimmie Rodgers, like the blues of Rodgers's contemporary Robert Johnson or Williams's contemporary (and Johnson's musical offspring) Muddy Waters, Williams's songs are highly crafted and self-conscious. But like Rodgers's and unlike Johnson's or Waters's, they often betray the stiff sense of rhythm that underpins nearly all country music, even the stuff you're supposed to dance to. Commentators have often claimed honky-tonk is the white man's blues, but if I'm right in saying that country music is a guilty dream of America, that comparison misses a point. Country's mythology masks its fears and real past, while the blues stands up and looks its own square in the face. Maybe that's one reason the blues and its descendants can dance more freely: They're not dragging the luggage of nostalgia. □

THEATER.

THOMAS M. DISCH

Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2
Light Shining in Buckinghamshire
Absent Friends
Taking Steps
Lost in Yonkers

Having lately had forebodings in this column and elsewhere about the future of the Public Theater and of Broadway in general, it is a pleasure to be able to report that for the time being, both those institutions are looking good. I had missed JoAnne Akalaitis's earlier contribution to the Public Theater's Shakespeare Marathon, her *Cymbeline*, but its general critical lambasting made one fear what she might do to the two parts of *Henry IV*, which pose, by virtue of their scale and intractable grandeur, the most considerable directorial challenge of all Shakespeare's plays. Akalaitis's production is compelling, well-mounted and distinctively her own. While she spices the physical design with a few anachronisms (Poins and others are smokers; the costumery evolves from doublet and hose to something resembling tailored topcoats in the course of the ten acts), she does not try to foist topical meanings on the text, despite the temptation posed by the alarums and excursions currently in progress on the stage of world history. (On the day and evening I saw the two plays, the ground phase of the war in the gulf had just begun.)

Part 1 starts inauspiciously, with a dumb show representing Richard II being roughed up by a rabble of uncostumed actors; but then the set is transformed into an immense gilded reredos, and Larry Bryggman, looking reasonably regal, declaims Henry's opening lines, "So shaken as we are, so wan with care . . . " And such is the authority of his delivery, and of Norris Shimabuku's responses in the role of Westmoreland, that one's first misgivings evaporate, and with the next scene, between Falstaff and Hal, all systems are go. Louis Zorich's Falstaff is rather more a fat old fox than a buffoon, an excellent corrupter of youth but only so-so in his slapstick with Pistol at the Boar's Head. Thomas Gibson, who has excelled in some lighter-weight roles during the Marathon, is not a Hal for the ages; he is capable in all technical departments (his duel with Hotspur, as choreographed by David S. Leong, is state of the art), but one could rarely sense a king within the scapegrace. I couldn't help making unfavorable comparisons to Kenneth Branagh's account of *Henry V* in the recent film—an unfair comparison, no doubt, but inescapable.

The star of Part 1 is the Hotspur, Jared Harris (son of Richard Harris), in his New York debut. Hotspur is usually played as a romantic figure, the last bloom on the tree of chivalry, but Jared Harris was having none of that. His Hotspur has all the chivalry of Saddam Hussein. He is loud and coarse and choleric, and his funniest lines are delivered with such ill will that even his wonderful wit fails to register as a redeeming virtue. This time there are no mixed feelings when Harry carries the day.

Indeed, if there is a moral to be drawn from Akalaitis's production, it is that not one of the principals has a redeeming virtue. They are sots and schemers, and all their sound and fury signifies the cynical wisdom that the best hope for domestic peace is an external enemy. Not an uplifting vision, but one scarcely foreign to the text, and in presenting it the director coordinates an imposing array of talents to aid and abet her own dark inspiration. There is incidental music by Philip Glass, ranging from gallopy battle anthems to sinister croonings and twitterings in quieter scenes. The design team—set by George Tsypin, costumes by Gabriel Berry and lighting by Jennifer Tipton—creates a succession of tableaux that are unwearyingly vivid all the way to the end of the tenth act. And in a score of secondary roles, as many actors shone or dazzled—among them, Traber Burns as Owen Glendower, Arnold Molina as Prince John, William Duell as Shallow, and Rodney Scott Hudson as York.

Two further endorsements. My companion at the matinee of Part 1 went

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straight to the box office at intermission to procure a ticket for Part 2. My companion at Part 2 declared that he preferred this production to the complete cycle of the history plays done by the English Shakespeare Company when it toured the United States two seasons ago. While I would not go quite that far, I won't stint in my applause. If you have the time, the stamina and can get tickets, try to see Parts 1 and 2 on the same day. It can't help but enhance the gestalt.

One of the most popular lowbrow spectacles of the last decade has been the demolition of mass quantities of used cars by so-called Monster Trucks. If there were a way, other than warfare, to treat the destruction of large buildings as theater, it would probably be just as popular. For those of more refined tastes, Broadway has lately offered a couple of spectacles nearly equivalent: the $2 million flop *La Bête* and the Zora Neale Hurston/Langston Hughes collaboration *Mule Bone*, which seems to be thriving despite all reason. Certain that both would flop and any criticism would be as unnecessary as their second acts would be painful, I absconded from each at intermission. Disaster in both cases was precipitated by the good intentions of bamboozled producers who thought they were bringing High Art to Broadway. With *Mule Bone*, which was produced by Lincoln Center with program credits for no less than nine funds and foundations (or about one such for every three members of the cast), there was, as well, an element of affirmative action in casting. *Mule Bone* has the advantage, in terms of its fundability, of being utterly innocuous and incapable of providing controversy. The characters on stage may come across as Hallmark-card darkies, but the authors responsible are leading figures in black literature. Such an undertaking transcends criticism and instead invites excuses.

Light Shining in Buckinghamshire is a lineal descendant of Shakespeare's history plays.

Meanwhile, at the Perry Street Theatre, the New York Theatre Workshop put on a play, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, that was the genuine article, Triple-A-Rated Dramatic Art, performed by a cast of six American actors who handled multiple roles and a variety of English accents with such professional panache that I could have imagined myself watching a performance by the Royal Shakespeare Company in London. They were Bill Camp, Philip Goodwin, Steve Hofvendahl, Cherry Jones, Shona Tucker and Gregory Wallace.

The play, by Caryl Churchill (who wrote *Cloud 9*, *Top Girls* and *Serious Money*), is a lineal descendant of Shakespeare's history plays, a chronicle of English history during the Civil War that focuses on the proto-far-left figures of that time—Ranters, Levelers and Diggers. Churchill shows a cross section of the lower orders—peasants, vagrants, apprentices and revolutionary cannon fodder—in moments of religious enthusiasm, political confusion, animal warmth and existential despair. Cromwell and his lieutenants also appear, in a scene of grand rhetorical combat with the mutinous rabble. As with Shakespeare, the historical events are lucidly depicted with no sacrifice of theatrical pizazz. Churchill's language puts the brummagem verses of *La Bête* to shame, and as a dramatic vision *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* may well exceed the author's other works, which are some of the finest plays of the last two decades. As a poetic statement of the general situation of leftists living in a period of reaction, I can think of no work of comparable power.

And yet this prodigy, by a celebrated playwright, closed on March 10 after a run of scarcely six weeks, including previews, in a theater seating about 100 people. It received a few good reviews, but always there was the appended caveat that this was a play that might make intellectual demands of its audiences and that, even more dismayingly, it would help to know something about English history. Sometimes (as Caryl Churchill has also noted), there's just no justice.

The good news from Broadway comes in the familiar form of comedies by Neil Simon and Alan Ayckbourn, the most consistently popular and prolific purveyors to commercial theater in New York and London. Ayckbourn's plays have not had nearly the success on Broadway that they've had on the West End, and so for two of them to be playing at once is almost like having an Ayckbourn festival, albeit of a retrospective nature, since both plays have had to wait a fair while to cross the Atlantic.

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Absent Friends (1974), at the Manhattan Theatre Club (technically not Broadway, but just around the corner), is the older of the two and conceptually the more modest. Its story hinges on the visit, after a long absence, of Colin, the recently bereaved member of a small coven of suburbanites whom the years have turned rancid. Colin is a monster of positive thinking and smarminess and bullies his old chums into exhuming the delusions of their youth, until one of them finally cracks. It's *The Iceman Cometh* in reverse, with, instead of Bowery bums, five twitty Brits getting their noses rubbed in the terrible truth. Peter Frechette as Colin can't help but steal the show, and Brenda Blethyn, a mainstay of the National Theatre, has been imported to play Diana, a British variant of the traditional Mad Housewife. Her culminating mad scene may strike some as inauthentic, not to say preposterous, as it asks us to believe that the secret sorrow of her life is that she could not join the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and wear their wonderful red uniform. Those who would cavil at that would probably also object to *Peter Pan* as unrealistic and *The Wind in the Willows* as farfetched. Like most prolific comic writers, Ayckbourn writes for his own private crew of commedia dell'arte figures—comic stereotypes who are costumed with new quirks and foibles in successive plays. There is the Adulterous Wife, who in this play is notable for being sullen and laconic (played by Gillian Anderson); the Philandering Husband (David Purdham); the Bumbling Innocent (John Curless); and a more vain and determinedly shallow version of the Mad Housewife (Ellen Parker). Ayckbourn's forte as a comedian of manners, and the secret of his success in England, is an ambivalent fondness/contempt for "middling" existences, for people who aren't overly bright or capable or attractive and their ordinary confusions, stupidities and hypocrisies. Rather than excoriate he laughs, or sometimes only smiles wryly, and he expects his audiences to be of a similar disposition. In America audiences tend to prefer either a more sentimental treatment of such matters (such as Neil Simon offers) or a more savage one, but I've never seen an Ayckbourn play I didn't like. *Absent Friends* may not be one of his best, but it's quite good enough, and it's cheering to know that Lynne Meadow, who directed it and is the artistic director of the Manhattan Theatre Club, has made a long-term commitment to mounting more of his plays.

Taking Steps, at the Circle in the Square Theatre, probably is among Ayckbourn's best, with one of the author's patented high-concept premises. To wit, the central arena stage represents three levels of the same house—attic, bedroom and lounge—and the connecting corridors and stairways. Events take place concurrently on all three levels without the characters being aware of those not on their floor. Six familiar figures from Ayckbourn's central casting department inhabit his conceptual funhouse: the Bumbler (who this time is the star, and is drolly overdone by Spike McClure); the Adulterous Wife (Jane Summerhays); the Old Sot (Christopher Benjamin); the Young Bore (Jonathan Hogan); a variant of the Mad Housewife, a fiancée in peril of marrying the Young Bore (Pippa Pearthree); and also, a dishonest contractor of the lower orders (Bill Buell). The plot is much more fanciful than that of *Absent Friends*, involving elaborate mistaken identities and belief in ghosts. Again, the point of such folderol is not to hold up the mirror to nature but to create an artificial pattern of events that has the power to surprise and delight. As so often in farce, one must give the author time to wind up all the clockwork mechanisms that will eventually come into play, which means that for the first half-hour or so one must attend closely without a lot of immediate mirth. Whether Alan Strachan's direction was to some degree responsible for the opening *longueurs* I wouldn't know without seeing an alternative production. *Absent Friends* seemed more of a piece, but comedy of manners is a more tractable genre than farce. If I could say which of the two to plump for, it would be *Taking Steps*.

> Absent Friends *is* The Iceman Cometh *in reverse, with five twitty Brits getting their noses rubbed in the terrible truth.*

As for the Neil Simon, what can one say? He's the last brand-name writer left on Broadway, the only one you can depend upon for (nonmusical) hits on the scale required to bring in 11,000 paying customers a week, the approximate capacity of the Richard Rodgers Theatre, where *Lost in Yonkers* recently opened. The preliminary hype emphasized that, this time out, Simon is getting really serious and creating characters of almost tragic dimensions, but don't believe it. The "tragic" element consists of Irene Worth playing a cantankerous, black-hearted old woman and Mercedes Ruehl playing her retarded, middle-aged daughter, who was abused as a child and now looks for love anywhere she can. In the event, Worth's black heart turns out to be licorice and the retarded daughter gets to deliver two show-stopping tirades, the moral of which is, If this is retarded who needs smart? Everything works out pretty much for the best, as we knew it would in a Neil Simon comedy. And there's nothing wrong with that.

What makes this play first-rate theater is that everyone involved is performing professionally, beginning with Santo Loquasto, who's designed a single set of a lower-middle-class living room in 1942, and costumes ditto, that rewards the inquiring eye more richly than one of Zeffirelli's costume dramas at the Metropolitan Opera. Loquasto has discovered an entire encyclopedia of forgotten browns and lost ochers that all say, in various tones of dismay, "1942! Ugly! 1942! Feh!"

As to the actors, there can be none happier on Broadway, for Simon is their Santa. Every moment you are in the spotlight in a Neil Simon play, you know that the audience will be eating out of your hand. Ruehl as the simple-minded but hyperlovable Aunt Bella has the juiciest of the play's plums, but Kevin Spacey as her brother, a would-be gangster with the demeanor of a thin Lou Costello, has been given his own little treasury of shticks. Worth's role as mean old Grandma Kurnitz is more in the nature of a sinecure, the kind of one-octave-ranged role that divas retire to in musical comedies after they've left the opera stage. Jamie Marsh as 15-year-old Jay and Danny Gerard as 13-year-old Arty make a splendid comedy team as wise-guy commentators on the older Kurnitzes. Gerard really is 13, and already has covered himself with acting honors from previous starring roles in *Falsettoland* and *Les Miz*. Try and see the show before Gerard has grown too tall to keep playing Arty. Otherwise, there's no hurry. *Lost in Yonkers* will probably put two or three more Artys through college before it closes; it was built to last. □

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EXCHANGE.

(*Continued From Page 434*)

tion. On January 8, when Amnesty testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, we noted the irony of using the report of a Nobel Peace Prize–winning organization to justify waging war, and we made known our distress about the selective use of our report to Senate majority leader George Mitchell and to other members of Congress.

What in fact characterizes Amnesty's work is a never-ending search for the truth about human rights abuses wherever and whenever they occur. The Iraqi government has been a gross violator of human rights for more than a decade. Other Middle East governments have also been responsible for serious human rights violations in their own countries or occupied lands. The U.S. government has a moral responsibility to seek to apply international human rights standards to foe and friend alike. It does not do so. If an evenhanded human rights policy had been shared by all the pivotal players in this crisis, perhaps the magnitude of the tragedy that confronts us might have been avoided.

Winston Nagan
John G. Healey
Amnesty International USA

COCKBURN REPLIES

Los Angeles

No Iraqi atrocity seized the public imagination more vividly than the charge that in the days following the August 2 invasion of Kuwait Iraqi soldiers murdered at least 312 prematurely born babies by plundering their incubators. President Bush, according to his publicists, had Amnesty's December report at his elbow as he planned to go to war. He referred to the incubator charges at least six times in one month, as well as indirectly in his speech on January 17 as the bombing began. Across the U.S.-led coalition, Amnesty's imprimatur to the charge was important in firming resolve for a "just" war. Members of the Australian Labor Party announced that it was, for some, the deciding factor.

In my February 4 column, I cited researches by another well-respected organization, Middle East Watch, which concluded that the accusation of incubator thefts leading to mass murder of babies could not be supported by the evidence. Amnesty's main witness, an employee and latterly a propagandist for the Kuwaiti government in exile, had reduced his claim from 312 to seventy-two, and his testimony on baby death from incubator theft was secondhand. Such doubts about Amnesty's reliability were justified, as has been made clear by reports from Kuwait since the end of the war. Chris Hedges of *The New York Times* (February 28), William Claiborne of *The Washington Post* (March 1) and John Martin, in an ABC *World News Tonight* special investigation aired on March 15, have all quoted senior Kuwaiti medical authorities as saying the allegations broadcast by Amnesty were entirely untrue. Most of these authorities were available for interview in exile in December, but at that point almost no one was interested in questioning allegations that, as outlined in the Amnesty report, were in important particulars patently unbelievable.

My comment that this was not the first time that Amnesty put political convenience and self-advertisement ahead of thorough and disinterested investigation outrages Neier, Nagan and Healey, as one might expect it would, since their pretense is to impartiality, immune to such political calculations. But it's naïve to imagine that human rights organizations are immune to such political calculations. Outfits like Amnesty and the Rights Watch groups survive by the favor of financial contributions from donors who themselves often have strong political opinions. These groups need respectability so that their researches will be reported in the press. The more ample the coverage, the more constant the flow of necessary funding. The fiercer the allegations of liberal bias from the State Department—as aimed against Americas Watch, for example, in the mid-1980s—the more sensitive the human rights organization will become and the more prudent in locating the median line of respectable opinion, as did Americas Watch at a crucial moment in the *contra* war.

None of this should be discomfiting, so long as it is borne in mind that human rights organizations have biases (e.g., against definitions of human rights that might have too "political" a content) and inhibitions (e.g., against being consigned to the editorial dustbin as being "radical" or "anti-West"). So the spectrum of the permissible is narrower than might be initially supposed, and the desire for a sensational press release on occasion greater.

Take Amnesty's report on Iraqi abuses in Kuwait. By December, nineteen weeks into the occupation, Amnesty had put out an eighty-page document. Fully twenty-three years have elapsed since Israel's occupation of the West Bank, and Amnesty has yet to produce as comprehensive a single report. Why the urgency only in the case of Kuwait?

Although torture in the occupied territories has been authoritatively documented as far back as 1977, including in a famous report by the London *Sunday Times* on June 19 of that year, Amnesty for many years exhibited great delicacy on the subject. Many critics of Amnesty's reporting on Israeli abuses insist that standards of proof are far more rigorous than elsewhere, requiring independent testimony in the case of torture. Professor Joseph Atick of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, who has done much work for Amnesty, told my colleague Rich McKerrow that "Amnesty is careful about how they gather information in the Middle East. . . . If there's a dispute where a soldier has shot a civilian, Amnesty would like to interview the soldier as well as other Palestinians." Atick, whose Amnesty chapter at Princeton urged expansion of the organization's work in the occupied territories, suggests—as do others—that since the beginning of the *intifada* Amnesty's work has improved, though he says that "at some point they did less; they worried about certain practical matters like funding. At the fundraising level some administrators tried to get us to tone down work out there."

'Sloppy' was hardly an unfair word to characterize Amnesty's work on the babies and the incubators.

Such prudence is not confined to Amnesty. Middle East Watch has a very poor record when it comes to human rights abuses by Israel. Its own reports on Iraqi abuses in Kuwait focused on "arbitrary arrest and detention," "ill treatment and torture," "collective punishment," "looting." Such topics find no place in Middle East Watch's surveys of the consequences of Israeli occupation. Its one important piece of work on the subject, "The Israeli Army and the Intifada" (1990), relies largely on reports from *The Jerusalem Post*, *The New York Times*, Israeli human rights groups and interviews with Israeli officials. Although the Palestinian human rights group Al Haq/Law in the Service of Man is cited in the acknowledgments, there are only a few passing references to its work in the body of the report. No fewer than 100 of the 187 pages in the body of the report deal with Israel's procedures for investigating the killing of Palestinians. As Norman Finkelstein, who has written extensively on the Israel-Palestine conflict and on human rights, notes correctly in an assessment of the report, "The sheer space devoted to this topic [i.e., procedures], together with the deference paid official explanations, lengthy discussions of procedural minutiae, and protracted debate on the pros and cons of the methods used by military authorities, all help sustain the utterly false pretense that the rule of law—fragile as it may be—still obtains in the occupied territories. Compare Middle East Watch's conclusion that there is still the rule of law in the occupied territories with that of the distinguished Israeli advocate Avigdor Feldman, who wrote in *Ha'aretz* in 1989: 'The illegality in the Territories is total. Everyone—regardless of echelon, regardless of disagreement on every other conceivable topic—is of a mind on one matter. The value of an Arab's life is equal to zero.' "

So, yes, Amnesty has on occasion taken a politically convenient course, as have the Rights Watch organizations. Nor was "sloppy" an unfair word to characterize Amnesty's work on the babies and the incubators. Most of Nagan and Healey's communication is

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boilerplate, but even with recent confirmation from Kuwait on the accuracy of my column, their attempted defense on the incubator issue is very weak. Their third paragraph says that Amnesty "noted reports that hundreds of infants had been killed by the deliberate denial of essential medical treatment." This is evasive, since Amnesty specifically noted three individual (though anonymous) allegations that a total of 331 premature babies had been taken from incubators and left to die.

Paragraph four says, without any detail, that Amnesty has received reports "confirming" such incubator deaths, for which "Iraqi security forces" are responsible. The earlier reports blamed "Iraqi soldiers." This may seem trivial, but in human rights investigations it's an important distinction, of which Nagan and Healey seem unaware.

Paragraph five talks weightily about "a painstaking process of cross-checking, corroboration and confirmation of critical facts from independent sources." No such process was at work in Amnesty's December report, which publicized without comment three accounts, the major one from a person who was not present in the hospital where the removals allegedly took place and who later, as noted, served as a paid propagandist for the Kuwaiti government in exile.

Paragraph six demonstrates the continuing laxity of this "cross-checking" process. I never addressed the question of how many incubators there were in Kuwait in August. Amnesty's prime charge required that there be 312 incubators in the Maternity Hospital in the al-Sabah complex, whereas the highest estimate at that time by hospital staff members leaving Kuwait in September, October and November was eighty. Nagan and Healey don't seem to realize that if, on their claim, there were 300 incubators in the five state hospitals in Kuwait, then it is plainly impossible for there to have been 312 in one of them.

Of course, Iraq committed barbaric acts in Kuwait, but this does not diminish the need for care in distinguishing fact from fiction. Exaggeration becomes one more weapon in the "just war." Hardly had two American missiles killed more than 300 civilians in a Baghdad air-raid shelter than Kuwait's government in exile rushed forward with a new charge that Iraq had executed 200 Kuwaitis. This was a transparent effort either to change the subject or to insinuate that the charred children in the shelter should be balanced by murdered innocents in Kuwait. In this sad arithmetic Kuwait's government in exile produced wildly varying numbers for deaths during and after the invasion: 3,000 (Kuwait's ambassador to the U.N.); 4,000 (Kuwait's ambassador in Washington); 7,000 (a Kuwaiti official's estimate to a British audience). Amnesty reckoned from 500 to more than 1,000. Middle East Watch reckoned some 550. A Kuwaiti public health official interviewed on ABC put the total at "a little bit over 300."

Although my column relied on Middle East Watch's researches, Aryeh Neier rushed to denounce me, beating Amnesty's letter by a full five days. It's clear enough why. Neier has been far more concerned with human rights politics—collegial relations with Amnesty—than with truth. I have good reason to believe that long before my column on the matter, Neier was mostly concerned with muffling any critical review of Amnesty's flawed performance. After my column was published he or one of his associates ordered Middle East Watch to keep its mouth shut. Reporters seeking to follow up on the story were told that the organization's only comment would be that it could not confirm Amnesty's report, and this is indeed what Neier hurriedly concedes in his protective letter.

'If Neier is now backing up Amnesty's 1986 report on Nicaragua he is contradicting years of findings by his own organization.'

This squalid example of politicking characterizes Neier's role as a columnist for *The Nation*. "Watching Rights" is not so much a dispassionate forum for discussion of rights abuses around the world as an instrument in Neier's own arsenal, masquerading as something else. *Nation* readers should be aware of this. As a major player in the human rights field Neier has, inevitably, a political agenda, although he denies it while throwing mud at anyone presuming to challenge his credentials. At a moment when the public was being lashed into hysteria, a figure such as Neier could have used the incubator affair, as scrutinized by his own organization, to urge care in the promulgation of atrocity stories. Such would have been the principled and courageous course.

My passing reference to Amnesty's shoddy 1986 report on Nicaragua elicits a sneer from Neier as well as defensive noises from Amnesty's executives. The report was published, complete with inflammatory press release, in February 1986, at a crucial stage in Ronald Reagan's campaign for $100 million in *contra* aid. a campaign that culminated a few months later with Congressional approval. The report's manifest bias provoked a storm in Britain, where it was assailed by the Labor Party and given critical and unfavorable review by four major newspapers.

The report contained five pages detailing human rights abuses by the *contras* and thirty pages on violations laid to the Nicaraguan government. For the latter, it relied heavily on the unverified charges of right-wing sources. Amnesty's "investigators" never confronted government officials with the allegations even though they were open to such inquiries. As one of Amnesty's investigators conceded to Jonathan Steele of *The Guardian* (U.K.), Amnesty had not visited any of the prisons whose conditions it discussed in the report, adding, "I can't say we weren't allowed to visit prisons." The report never mentioned, in its summary of concerns, the name of the prime contractor of human rights abuses, the United States.

As for the clandestine graves, in its 1986 report Amnesty referred to the Nicaraguan government's use of "special measures," explaining that this term was "apparently used to signify summary execution." For this Amnesty was relying on claims by José Alvaro Baldizón, a Nicaraguan émigré and former employee of the Nicaraguan Ministry of the Interior who by that time was a paid employee of the U.S. State Department.

Baldizón asserted that the Nicaraguan government had killed 2,000 with its "special measures," an allegation that was effectively undone by Americas Watch, whose challenge of Baldizón's credibility was available to Amnesty at the time it drafted its report. I showed Neier's letter to Mark Cook, who wrote a critique of Amnesty's 1986 report for the Jesuit-sponsored Nicaraguan publication *Envío*. As he commented to me: "Neier says that the discovery of some clandestine graves last summer suggests that Amnesty was right after all. If he has now decided to back up Amnesty's 1986 finding about 'special measures,' implying that the Nicaraguan government had a policy, enunciated at the highest level, of killing draft resisters and suspected *contra* collaborators, he is not only contradicting years of findings by his own organization, he is flying in the face of common sense. If there were such a policy, it would be all too obvious, as is unfortunately the case in El Salvador, Guatemala and Colombia. This would be all the more apparent now that a new government is in power; anyone with knowledge of human rights abuses committed by the former government would have little reason to fear coming forward. The fact that a radical change in government has produced so few reports of clandestine graves, wartime disappearances and the like is itself evidence that the number of out-of-combat killings was comparatively small for such a long and brutal war fought on national territory. This is obviously of scant comfort to the families of the victims. But if Neier does now wish to reverse years of findings by investigators from his own organization and endorse the Baldizón claims, a three-sentence aside in a letter is as inadequate as the new evidence itself."

Neier seems to think that since I cited Middle East Watch's work on Kuwait, I am bound to approve of what Americas Watch concluded about the invasion of Panama and have a political bias if I don't. With Rich McKerrow I did a long survey of various inquiries into the invasion and its aftermath and did not find the work of Americas Watch particularly

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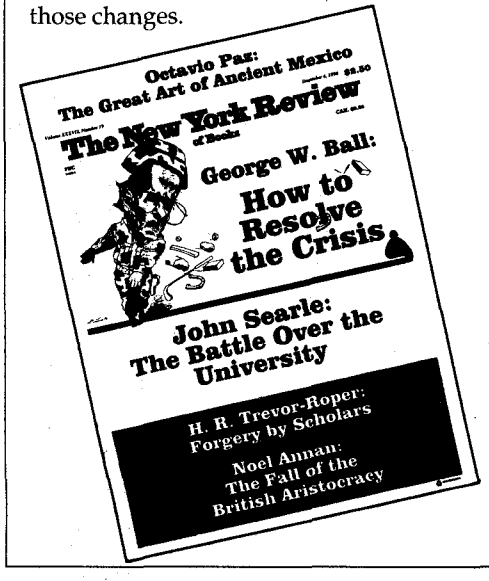
Saddam Hussein by David Levine



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persuasive (its report, incidentally, stated that Guillermo Endara and his cronies in the post-Noriega government "began as democratically elected leaders").

The Costa Rican human rights organization Codehuca spent more time in Panama and investigated more thoroughly than Americas Watch. It concurs with our estimate of "more than 1,000 and possibly as many as 2,500," concluding that "the real numbers are closer to 2,000, if not more." Our estimate was based on Codehuca's work; on that of the most persevering U.S. journalist in Panama, *Newsday*'s Peter Eisner (who reckoned 1,000 may have been killed); on calculations based on a CBS poll of Panamanians right after the invasion; on discussion with people who lived in Panama at the time or visited after the invasion.

Neier writes that conditions for investigation in post-invasion Panama were better than in Kuwait. Undoubtedly, but this occludes the fact that there was tremendous fear in Panama during the invasion, in its aftermath, and today. Without mentioning the climate of fear and repression, either when the Americas Watch delegation went to Panama or today, Neier writes: "We could visit the sites; we could interview witnesses in Panama; we could interview officials and examine their records; and we could obtain the assistance of Panamanian human rights monitors with whom we had previously worked." Only two individuals went to Panama for this report. Their trip lasted from January 9 to 20. If they visited Jardín de Paz and Mount Hope in Colón, the sites of mass graves, they made no mention of them.

Nor could they have visited the other alleged mass grave sites, which the official Panamanian medical examiner, Dr. Umberto Mas, told *60 Minutes* surely do exist. Eisner writes in *Newsday* for December 21, "Human rights activists have catalogued dozens of cases of missing people who do not appear on the government's lists of dead or missing. They say fear and resignation have led many people to suffer the loss of loved ones in silence, rather than face what they believe to be a nonresponsive bureaucracy."

José Luis Morín from the Center for Constitutional Rights has gone to Panama twice since the invasion. In January 1990 he traveled with the National Lawyers Guild group, which regards 2,000 deaths as a very plausible figure. Americas Watch fails to take account of Panama as a militarily occupied country. Morín says, "Many interviews I conducted were with people who insisted on anonymity. These people were scared; some had been visited and harassed by U.S. soldiers."

Alexander Cockburn

CORRECTION

We regret an editorial error that caused the words "World War I" to read "World War II" in Steve Wasserman's March 18 letter to the editor.

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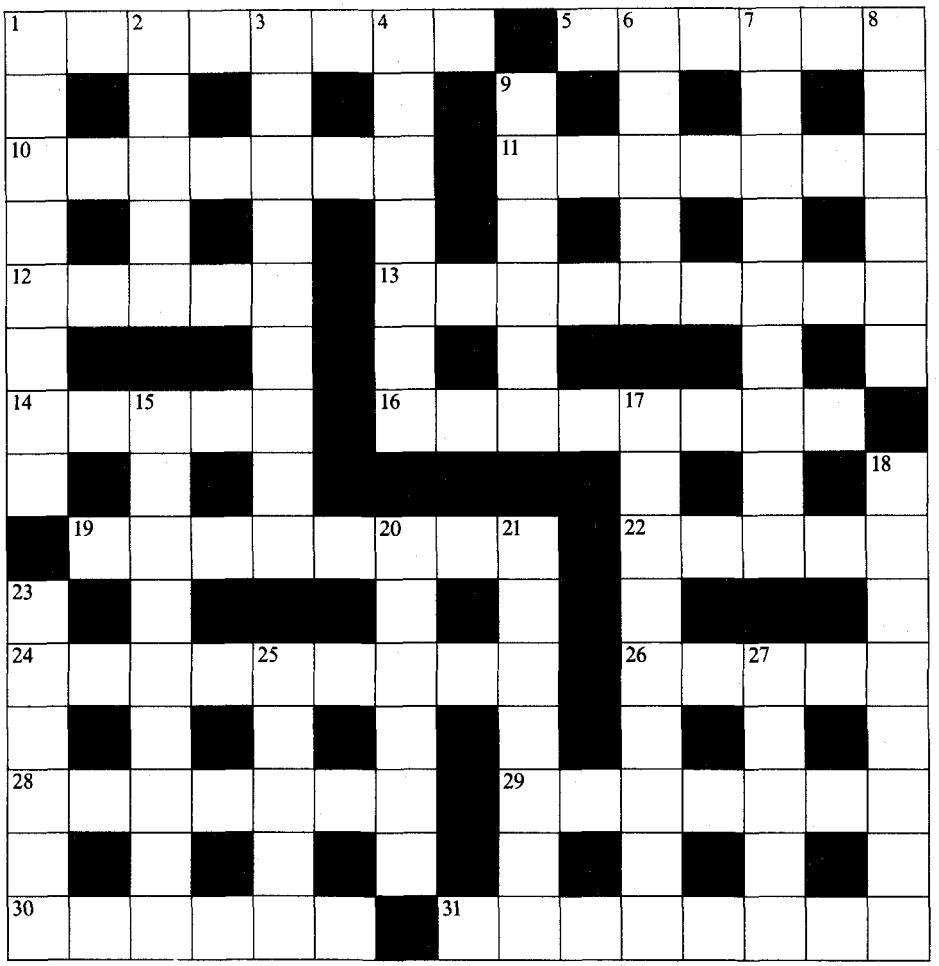
SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2330

A	I	R	C	O	N	D	I	T	I	O	N	E	D	■
C	■	E	■	V	■	V	■	R	■	M	■	■	■	L
C	O	M	M	E	M	O	R	A	T	E	S	■	■	A
I	■	E	■	R	■	R	■	G	■	N	■	B	■	D
D	E	M	O	C	R	A	T	I	C	■	A	L	L	Y
E	■	B	■	O	■	K	■	C	■	W	■	O	■	W
N	A	R	R	O	W	■	M	A	C	A	R	O	N	I
T	■	A	■	K	■	J	■	L	■	T	■	D	■	N
P	I	N	N	E	D	U	P	■	M	E	S	S	E	D
O	■	C	■	D	■	R	■	R	■	R	■	T	■	E
L	I	E	D	■	H	A	V	E	A	C	H	A	I	R
I	■	S	■	S	■	S	■	A	■	O	■	I	■	M
C	■	■	D	I	S	S	E	M	B	L	A	N	C	E
Y	■	■	■	G	■	I	■	E	■	O	■	E	■	R
■	B	L	A	N	K	C	A	R	T	R	I	D	G	E

Crossword Puzzle No. 2331

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 Something corny with what might be woven according to the description of the haunted house! (8)
5 Striking miners in England would do so only in extreme cases, right under the shoulder. (6)
10 Perhaps powder making up "The Curse," or one who looks very hard for it. (7)
11 Almost horsey, another animal makes night and day the same. (7)
12 If 2 down, there's a lot of this. (5)
13 Sounds as though someone like Mame was taken out, being assigned somewhat earlier. (9)
14 For some reason, this little beast means money in London! (5)
16 In a manner like Hardy's returnee? (8)
19 What campers often pull might keep detectives occupied. (5-3)
22 and 28 How some clothes are joined with hair—at least by these workers. (12)
24 Endearing, perhaps, but somewhat syrupy! (9)
26 A mode of expression, one with five hundred and ten with a thousand. (5)
28 See 22
29 See 6 down
30 The season of the 29, if one puts two and two together. (6)
31 Reverse condition around 50 for people who are enjoying themselves. (8)

DOWN

1 Damn this! (It's slang!) (8)
2 and 15 Do we hear a hippie described by Naval slang? (With a wide grin, it seems.) (5,2,3,4)
3 A defensive position makes a bad heart strive hard. (9)
4 The type of 29 where you might get something like a cheap computer? (7)
6 and 27, and 29 across A description of the girl in "Blow the Man Down" who might also be considered 2 and 15. (5,2,3,7)
7 Swing the camera around on the Cinders girl, and get a cigar! (9)
8 Formal wear at the musical junction? (6)
9 What the erotic might indulge in on holiday is sometimes offered on the musical stage. (6)
15 See 2
17 A waistcoat, a sort of blue one, seen in the lobby. (9)
18 Before reunification they weren't worth much, like most wrecked old boats. (8)
20 Is it just a fancy name for being out of work? (6)
21 Made with care, let out like molasses (not only in January!) (7)
23 A swinger's made of things that suggest rock. (6)
25 A little bit of land sounds like a little bit of land, but a couple might march down it. (5)
27 See 6

SEE LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION AT LEFT

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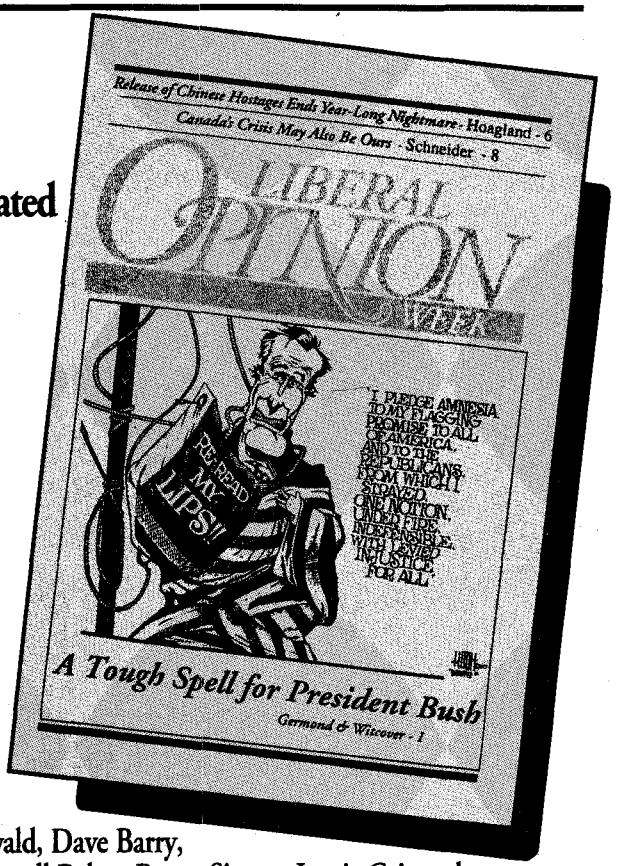
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